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30 June 2020

LRC & IVTU OPEN LETTER REGARDING FREE STUDENT LEGAL COUNSEL

TO: Dr. Marisela Márquez, Associated Students Executive Director
Chancellor Henry T. Yang, UC Santa Barbara
Janet Nepalitano, President of the University of California
Regent John A. Pérez, Chair of the UC Regents
Margaret Klawunn, Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
Cheryl Lloyd, Interim Vice President Systemwide Human Resources Leadership & Immediate Office
Cynthia Señeriz, Human Resources Director UCSB
Nancy G. Hamill, UCSB Chief Campus Counsel & UCOP Senior Counsel

Dear Campus Community and University Leadership,

The Associated Students Legal Resource Center was established in approximately 1996 and was given independent funding in 2001 by ballot initiative by the students of UCSB. They saw a gap in the services provided by the University, which unlike our counterparts in Berkeley, Los Angeles and San Diego, did not provide students with free confidential legal consultation. So, the students themselves voted to increase our student fees to finance a service that filled this gap, not once, but three times in 2001, 2006 and 2017. **This service was not and is not provided elsewhere by the University and is extremely important for all students.** A change that would take away the privileged confidentiality between students and LRC Staff is fundamental to the essence of the service, and any attempt to do away with this aspect is contrary to the will of the students.

Students voted in 2001 to finance a service to provide “free legal education and consultation to students” by over 70% and have continuously reaffirmed the cost of the service at our own expense by large margins every cycle with support for the Legal Resource Center never dipping below 70%. In 2017, the students again not only reaffirmed the cost of the resource that provides free and confidential legal counsel, but also voted to increase the cost put on students in order to expand services. This was once again accomplished with the support of over 70% of students who voted. Just last year, in 2019, students reaffirmed the importance and the cost of the program by 83.91%. **Students have continuously and loudly supported the work of the Legal Resource Center with the range of services that it currently offers.**

The proposed changes to the job description actively take away the ability of the center to provide the level of services that students voted for, envisioned, and have enjoyed in its current form since 2000, including privileged, confidential consultation for all UCSB students. It is important that the University listen to the input of students and long-time LRC staff about the needs and vision for any service or entity funded by the students.

This situation is time sensitive. The contract of the current LRC Attorney, Robin Unander, is set to expire on June 30, and without a continuation of the status quo while negotiations continue, **students will be without the important legal support that many rely on in a privileged setting.** If the University cared about supporting the students, **including the 1,300 students who use come to the LRC annually to utilize this service,** they would work to immediately continue the services provided and supported by student fees without a loss of privileged confidentiality or a change in service.

Robin Unander has worked at the Legal Resource Center and is the primary attorney providing LRC legal education and privileged, confidential consultation to students since 2003. Since 2019, Robin has also been serving in the capacity of IVTU Caseworker, providing students with direction and advice on housing-related issues. Over her nearly 17 years of service in Associated Students, Robin has served generations of UCSB students, helping us navigate the complexities of the law. **We would like to see her continue to provide students with free and privileged confidential legal counsel and provide case-working services for IVTU into the immediate future.**

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We received word yesterday that the University will not be continuing the status quo, and the current LRC contact will end June 30. This means that the many students currently seeking legal help and that will look to the Legal Resource Center in the immediate future with tenant-landlord disputes, law enforcement, immigration status, and the many other topics that LRC Attorneys assist students in understanding free of charge will be unable to get this assistance with the service provided being privileged and confidential. It also means that **all students and Isla Vista community members that are seeking assistance with housing-related questions through IVTU will no longer be able to receive services with a professional caseworker.**

A petition on change.org was created by incoming LRC Student Unit Director Sabina Menzhausen and outgoing Director Riley Traut on June 25 that asked the University to adjust the new job description to allow for the continuation of confidential legal services and no changes to current abilities of LRC attorneys to conduct their work. **To date, this petition has accrued over 1,900 signatures.**

We, the Legal Resource Center Student Leadership and the Isla Vista Tenants Union, understand how important the services that LRC and IVTU provide are to students and the Isla Vista community. **We demand that the University continue the status quo while negotiations continue or conduct a staff hire of the current LRC employee Robin Unander that allows her to continue the level of service LRC currently provides, including privileged confidentiality, without a pause in service. We demand that Administrators listen to the voice of students in issues regarding the services provided by student fees and that they see the importance of this service remaining privileged and confidential to protect students.**

The Legal Resource Center, the Isla Vista Tenants Union and the others undersigned stand behind Robin Unander and are committed to providing students with free and privileged, confidential legal counsel to all students and housing-related support for all residents of Isla Vista.

Signed in solidarity,

Sabina Menzhausen
Legal Resource Center Student
Unit Director & IVTU Vice
Chair, 2020-2021

Alex Young
IVTU Chair, 2020-2021