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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0502

June 6, 2015

Mr. Leslie Wong, President
Office of the President
1600 Holloway Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94132

Dear President Wong:

Since my election to the California Assembly in 2006 and my subsequent election to Congress in 2012, I have enjoyed a great working relationship with the Romberg Tiburon Center (RTC) and its parent institution, San Francisco State University (SFSU). I have always considered myself a strong supporter of RTC and its mission, and a friend of SFSU.

It is in that spirit that I am writing to urge you to reconsider the recent decision by RTC's new director, Dr. Karina Nielsen, to abruptly evict the Tiburon Salmon Institute (TSI), which has operated a community-supported salmon conservation and environmental education program for the past 42 years. This decision is grossly unfair to TSI and the community of students, parents, educators and conservationists that supports its work. Moreover, the decision was made and conveyed arrogantly, under questionable circumstances, and without Dr. Nielsen even bothering to consult with her RTC Advisory Board – an esteemed group of experts and community leaders who would have opposed her decision. Indeed, I am informed that upon learning of the decision after the fact, an executive committee of the Advisory Board met yesterday afternoon and voted to express their disagreement with Dr. Nielsen's actions and to urge you to reverse the decision.

When I learned of Dr. Nielsen's actions earlier this week, I was surprised and dismayed because I had personally met with Dr. Nielsen in my Washington office on March 5, 2015 and spoke very directly with her about TSI. I told Dr. Nielsen at that time that I was concerned by reports from TSI's Executive Director Brooke Halsey that she didn't like having TSI on the property and may be trying to run them out. Dr. Nielsen assured me in no uncertain terms that was not her intent. She said the problem was that her predecessor at RTC had been too lax on many things including liability and safety issues, and that she needed to tighten things up. She said that she simply wanted to work out some basic assurances from Mr. Halsey as conditions of TSI continuing at RTC. It's now clear that Dr. Nielsen was less than truthful.

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Unbeknownst to me, to the community, and to the RTC Advisory Board, at the time Dr. Nielsen met with me RTC had retained a commercial real estate agent and had posted a multiple listing circular offering the entire RTC property for sale or long-term lease. I am informed that this solicitation of potential buyers of RTC was posted in approximately January of 2015 and remained active until just a few days ago – when a concerned community member heard about it and called your office, at which time it was quickly removed from the internet.

I am also troubled by the shifting and conflicting explanations I have received about the basis for Dr. Nielsen's decision. When you and I spoke briefly by telephone earlier this week, you stated that Dr. Nielsen told you she had been trying for months to get TSI to provide various safety assurances and that TSI had refused to comply with her repeated requests, leaving her no choice but to ask him to leave. But when my District Director Jenny Callaway subsequently spoke with your government relations representative Lisbet Sunshine, she was told RTC had "determined" that TSI's presence at RTC was "incompatible" with the RTC program.

Neither of these explanations hold water. Regarding Dr. Nielsen's "refusal to comply" contention, I am informed that Mr. Halsey was trying in good faith to address her concerns. Among other things, he was in the process of securing written documentation of the longstanding agreements TSI has with partnering federal and state agencies – including agreements that have long permitted TSI to use the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's warehouse at RTC and to rear and release juvenile salmonids from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. It is my understanding that TSI had also obtained liability insurance specifically covering SFSU and required all fish release participants to sign liability waivers.

As for the "incompatibility" explanation from Ms. Sunshine, it truly strains credibility. TSI is a community-based environmental education and salmonid conservation group – a mission that squarely matches the stated goals and purpose of RTC. Ironically, I am informed that the other tenants at RTC include several whose presence would not seem to be nearly as compatible as TSI, including the SFSU ceramics program and DuPont Chemical.

Your leadership is needed to reverse this rash decision by Dr. Nielsen and restore the faith and confidence of me and many others who are likely to share my concerns.

Thanks to TSI and the dedicated work of Mr. Halsey, generations of young people in Marin County have learned about salmon and their dwindling habitat. In addition to educating youth about resource protection, TSI projects link RTC with elementary, middle and high school students from every school district in Marin County, as well as community organizations like Tiburon Peninsula Foundation, Belvedere Community Foundation, Allen Family Foundation and other funders. Through projects such as *Trout in the Classroom* and the hatchery and salmon release program, over a million salmon have

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been released into the San Francisco Bay. Just two weeks ago, over a thousand supporters attended the *Kiss and Release* event.

Our fragile salmon populations are hanging on by a thread with juvenile survival threatened by drought and human impacts. This year more than ever, the successful rearing and release of these juveniles serves a conservation purpose in addition to the great educational value TSI provides. RTC is situated on the salmon migration path – a unique and valuable site for this program.

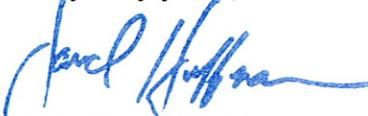
Your administration and every prior RTC Director have allowed TSI to operate at Romberg and have included it in its open houses and other activities. With the arrival of Dr. Nielsen something changed and the relationship with TSI shifted from a longstanding partnership to one of suspicion and animosity.

The culmination of this deteriorating relationship came on June 1st when Dr. Nielsen abruptly told TSI that — for the first time in four decades — it could not conduct the 2015 salmon release program at Romberg. Whether intentional or not, this sends a message to the entire community that has worked with TSI for two generations that RTC no longer cares about them and is even willing to jeopardize the survival of thousands of salmon smolts that were scheduled for release at RTC in order to be rid of TSI. It's a message of arrogance, ambivalence about salmon conservation, and a poke in the eye to the community I represent.

It is not too late to make this situation right. I urge you to accept the recommendation of your own RTC Advisory Board – to reverse this terrible decision and work with TSI and other conservation groups to preserve this important legacy of environmental education and salmon conservation for future generations. My staff and I are ready to provide assistance in working out an acceptable agreement between RTC and TSI.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Very truly yours,



JARED HUFFMAN
Member of Congress