

March 29, 2021

Jamie Rappaport Clark
President and CEO
Defenders of Wildlife
1130 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Jamie:

As supervisors in five departments with more than 120 combined years of service to Defenders of Wildlife - an organization to which we have a deep and abiding commitment - we are compelled to address the ongoing culture of fear and lack of commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) at this organization. Three external consultant reviews of our internal culture and DEI efforts have identified a pattern of actions by you and the executive team that perpetuate a culture of fear. But you and the executive team have never taken responsibility for creating this culture, let alone taken meaningful or effective action to change it. Neither Defenders' dedicated staff nor our mission to save life on earth is served by executive leadership that disrespects its employees and stifles the cultural transformation necessary for our success.

Defenders' diversity statement and strategic plan assert: "Our greatest strength is our skilled, talented and dedicated employees; we care about their welfare and professional growth—and will always listen to their suggestions for improving our decision-making processes and operations. We foster empowerment at all levels of our organization through clarity of authority and accountability. We value the unique perspectives and backgrounds of our colleagues and work to expand the diversity of our workforce, board of directors and coalitions."

Unfortunately, events of recent weeks once again call into question the executive team's commitment to live by these principles themselves. The Avarna Group process was intended to advance Defenders' DEI efforts. Instead, the executive team's control of the process, misrepresentation of the Avarna Group's intended approach to building a plan, efforts to sanitize the Avarna Group's deliverables (including earlier versions of the listening session report and a DEI commitment statement), and lack of accountability and candor with respect to its role in the Avarna Group's decision to end its consulting work disempowers staff, silences our views and opinions, and impedes or altogether halts meaningful progress toward advancing DEI and eliminating fear at Defenders. Indeed, it exemplifies the important organizational, cultural, and structural issues identified in the Avarna Group's report.

While we strongly support the development of a robust DEI plan, we no longer trust the executive team members to oversee the formulation and implementation of that plan. Our trust and confidence are particularly shaken because the executive team's actions in this instance are part of a longstanding pattern of lack of accountability, transparency, and candor relating to Defenders' employees. Three processes - the Raben Group report, the Stratton Consulting Group's organizational assessment, and now the Avarna Group report - have each identified a

culture of fear among Defenders' staff manifested not only by concern for retribution but also by a lack of transparency in decision-making, a lack of candor in communications, a lack of respect for and trust in staff, a lack of commitment to diversifying our staff and creating an inclusive culture, and a general sense among staff of disempowerment and lack of autonomy. Despite these consistent themes reflected by each of these consultants' findings, the issues they identified have been downplayed, ignored, or rejected by the executive team. The executive team must acknowledge and meaningfully address these issues in order for Defenders to develop and implement a robust and meaningful DEI plan that will allow the organization to live up to the values we share. The executive team must also acknowledge and address these issues if we are to retain our hard-working and deeply committed staff, let alone recruit and train a new generation of conservation leaders.

As supervisors of a dedicated and effective staff deserving of our respect, trust, transparency, and honesty, we can no longer remain silent in the face of the executive team's ongoing disregard for the values expressed in Defenders' diversity and commitment statements. To move forward effectively, you and the executive team must take direct responsibility for and meaningfully address the significant cultural and structural issues identified by all three consultants and implement the suggested strategies and tactics for which the executive team is accountable.

First and foremost, the executive team must repair the breach of trust with staff. This requires acknowledging the existence of the culture of fear and the related issues raised in this letter and the executive team's role in creating and perpetuating these problems over the last several years. It also requires the executive team to be fully transparent with staff regarding the Avarna process; this includes sharing the Avarna Group's reasons for terminating their contract, which the executive team received by email, and the original, unedited, listening session report.

Until the executive team repairs that breach of trust and commits to transparency and accountability, actions it may take in developing a new DEI planning process or implementing isolated actions will ring hollow. The executive team has been presented with the Avarna Group's report detailing feedback from staff during the listening sessions, a long list of staff recommendations, draft visioning statements that reflect input from staff and the leadership team, and a draft DEI plan from the Avarna Group that addresses the vision statement that commits Defenders to an equitable, inclusive and diverse workplace. Given the events of the last several years, and particularly the last several weeks, we and many of our staff are frankly reluctant to continue to participate in additional DEI-related program planning that we believe will not lead to meaningful change. It is time for the executive team to lead by example and engage in a transparent, accountable, authentic, and sustained effort to diversify our staff, ensure equity within our organization, and create and maintain a respectful and inclusive work environment.

This letter was not easy for us to write but this culture of fear must change. We are hopeful that you and the executive team will take the content of this letter seriously and act on it rather than engage in an effort to identify or retaliate against its authors. With a sincere effort to address the

issues identified in this letter, we could start to move forward toward the repair of the now-broken culture at Defenders and the advancement of the DEI goals we all share.

Sincerely,
Defenders of Wildlife Leaders