

December 20, 2017

The Honorable Ken Cooley
Chair, Assembly Rules Committee
State Capitol Room 3013
Sacramento, CA 95814
Via email

Dear Assembly Member Cooley:

I am writing to report that Assembly Member Dante Acosta improperly used Assembly resources to attempt to harass and intimidate me in February 2017, while a defamation suit I filed against him was pending. In addition, he participated in a coordinated effort with Senator Scott Wilk and others to defame me and destroy my career.

I am not intending to share every detail or witness in this letter, but here is a brief overview of what happened and some background.

In late May and early June 2016 I had phone conversations with Rep. Steve Knight and (then-Senate employee) Vanessa Wilk about then-candidate Acosta's inappropriate behavior toward me and my concerns for his fitness for office in light of that behavior. During those conversations I told them about an incident in January 2015 in which Acosta propositioned me while we were meeting in Washington DC about his future political plans and my role in those campaigns. Acosta was an employee of Knight in May 2016, and both he and then-Asm. Wilk had endorsed Acosta in his Assembly campaign.

Though Acosta's proposition and the comments he made about my sexuality and physical appearance both to me and to others over the next year or so were upsetting and degrading, I didn't ask Rep. Knight in that phone call to take any official action against Acosta since my career had not been negatively affected at that time. Rep. Knight was disturbed and upset about what had happened to me and asked me to let him know if he could be of assistance in the future, and I agreed. Within a few weeks, Acosta was dismissed from his job with Rep. Knight.

I recapped the conversations in an email to Vanessa Wilk a day after my conversation with her and copied Rep. Knight and Sen. Wilk. After the conversations and email, nothing was said publicly about the matter until it became public in October 2016.

In October 2016 the email I had sent to both Wilks and Rep. Knight was published in local news reports with some identifying information redacted, including my name and email address. Within hours of that news report a consulting contract my business partner had with a legislative candidate was canceled under pressure from Sen. Wilk, and my partner was told that outstanding invoices could not be paid.

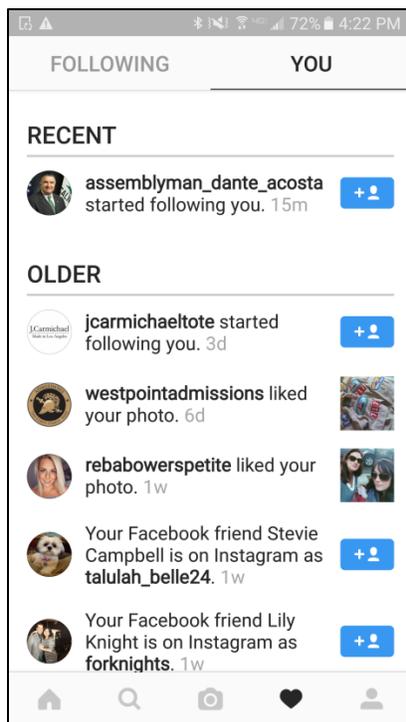
Acosta's campaign gave the media my name and contact information, and I started receiving calls from the LA Times, ABC News, and other outlets asking for comment. With no regard for my safety or privacy (or the safety or privacy of my children), Acosta's campaign provided reporters screenshots of text messages for publication that had my full name and phone number clearly visible. (These screenshots were live online until I was alerted by a friend to their existence. I had to call the news outlet myself to demand that they be taken down or my private information redacted.)

Acosta [appeared](#) on television calling me a liar and looking for revenge, and characterizing our business relationship as me "aggressively pursuing" him. He held a press conference in which he blatantly lied about others being present during one of his phone calls to me. His campaign created and [released videos](#) on social media featuring "testimonials" from women I don't know calling me a liar.

Because of this behavior and other retaliatory conduct aimed at me and my business associates, coordinated between Acosta and Sen. Wilk, I retained legal counsel and filed a defamation suit ([complaint here](#)) against Acosta and other unnamed defendants on November 1, 2016.

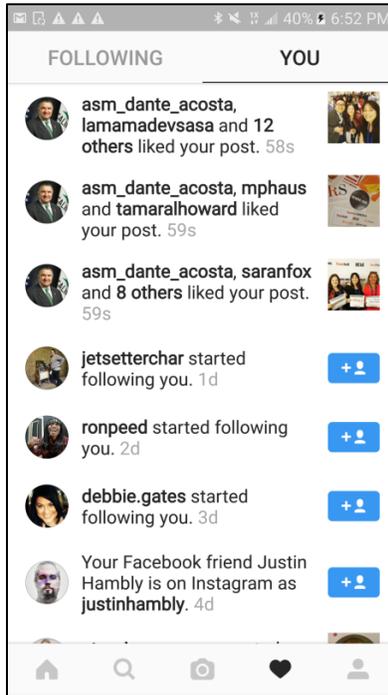
Acosta won the general election and was sworn in to the Assembly in December.

On February 10, 2017, I received a notification on my personal Instagram account that Asm. Acosta was now following me. I clicked on the notification, which took me to Acosta's official Assembly Instagram account and not a personal account. (Time/date stamped [screenshots available](#).) Asm. Acosta, through his Assembly Instagram account, then began liking pictures of me - not pictures of food or landscapes or inanimate objects, but pictures of me.



By the end of November 2016 I knew that my prospects of working in GOP politics in California were slim, in large part thanks to the actions of Acosta and Wilk to damage my professional reputation, so I started writing for RedState. In February 2017 I was interviewing for an additional position with Townhall.com. While at CPAC in February I attended a networking reception sponsored by the parent company of both RedState and Townhall and posted pictures of myself at the event on my personal Instagram account. Within an hour I began receiving notifications that Asm. Acosta liked photos from the event - photos in which I stated I was representing RedState. I became anxious and fearful about what he might try to do to harm my career and ability to provide

as a single mom. He was sending a message that he was still watching me, still had his eye on what I was doing, and could resume his retaliation at any time.



Here are larger versions of the photos he liked:





jkinlosangeles
CPAC 2018

jkinlosangeles The Empire #cpacnextgen



11 likes

FEBRUARY 24

Add a comment...



jkinlosangeles
CPAC 2018

jkinlosangeles Represent #RedState
#cpacnextgen



24 likes

FEBRUARY 24

Add a comment...



A few weeks after the last Instagram notification, and around the time the first court hearings were scheduled in the defamation case, my dad was diagnosed with advanced acute myeloid leukemia. Due to his diagnosis and short life expectancy I withdrew my defamation case so I could concentrate on spending time with him and helping my sons (especially my youngest, who has severe learning disabilities) through this traumatic time.

I still have physical symptoms of anxiety and fear when Asm. Acosta's name comes up. Since I am active in the community and in politics that is not an infrequent occurrence. In fact, he recently spoke to a civic leadership group I am a member of, and I was distressed for days before that meeting knowing I would be in the same room with someone who attempted to destroy my career and reputation.

I am filing this report because I believe Asm. Acosta and Sen. Wilk's retaliatory conduct toward me, both as legislative candidates and now as elected office holders, should not be tolerated, and they should be held accountable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jennifer Van Laar".

Jennifer Van Laar

cc: Assembly Member Laura Friedman, Chairwoman, Assembly Rules Subcommittee on Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation Prevention and Response

Assembly Member Marie Waldron, Vice Chairwoman, Assembly Rules Subcommittee on Harassment, Discrimination, and Retaliation Prevention and Response