



August 10, 2020

Roger Gitlin
Supervisor, District I
County of Del Norte
981 H Street, #200
Crescent City, CA 95531

1000 North
Alameda Street
Los Angeles
CA 90012

213.928.8800
FAX 213.928.8801
800.449.4149

Dear Mr. Gitlin:

This letter is a response to your letter dated August 7, which sets out a complaint about two billboard signs in Del Norte County paid for by The California Endowment.

We acknowledge your first amendment rights to express an opinion about these signs.

As you know through our decade long partnership and investment in Del Norte County and Tribal Lands, The California Endowment is a private health foundation with a mission to improve the health of all Californians. Despite California's standing as a global economic and social powerhouse, data shows that people of color in California still suffer significant health disparities. And this is no accident: the death of George Floyd and the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color, and particularly Black and Native communities, is the inevitable result of systemic racism that has plagued these communities for generations.

Over a decade ago we made a deliberate choice to invest in Del Norte County and Tribal Lands because we believed it was unjust for the residents of Del Norte County and the Yurok reservation to suffer appalling health inequities relative to the rest of California. We also recognized rural communities have long been ignored with philanthropic funding and resources often directed to cities and metro areas. In our view this was wrong and our deep partnership with the people of Del Norte and Tribal Lands was formed with a singular intent to create equitable health outcomes for all in Del Norte County. And we will not be able to make a difference for all until we have addressed the significant disparities that exist in the most marginalized communities.

www.calendow.org

Native American tribal members in Del Norte still remember massacres inflicted on them by settlers sponsored by State leaders; just like they still remember armed conflict with State and Federal troopers over rights to fish in the 1970s. Today, In Del Norte County, we know that Black and Native people have disproportionately high rates of incarceration and have lower high school graduation rates. Further, Native Americans in Del Norte County have a life expectancy of 67.8 years; 16.9 years less than their fellow non-Native citizens ([note: no life expectancy data for Black in DN](#)). The California Endowment takes the view that these statistics are not the result of character flaws or laziness but rather the result of generations of racist policies meant to ensure those at the bottom remain at the bottom.

We are deeply invested in improving health outcomes for all residents of Del Norte County and Tribal Lands and we can only achieve this by ensuring the most disenfranchised can participate in their democracy. And we have seen the community respond to this call. We saw this at Sunset Continuation High School when students won an equitable school lunch from Del Norte Unified School District. We saw this when Latinx parents worked with County Parks and Recreation to ensure recreational basketball was available in Smith River. We saw this when Native families demanded more equitable conditions for students at Margaret Keating Elementary School resulting in improved internet access and fair classroom support. We saw this when immigrant families met with the Sheriff when ICE was threatening to come to Del Norte. And we saw this when families of all backgrounds came out to oppose anti-immigrant stances at the Board of Supervisors on behalf of their immigrant neighbors.

We believe the people most impacted by policy need to be at the center of creating policies which is why we invested in a decade long relationship with Del Norte County: because decades of economic disenfranchisement have hurt its residents and particularly its most vulnerable. We are privileged to have supported Del Norte leaders working to improve equity in complex systems by addressing root causes including improving kindergarten readiness and third grade reading; building a health career pathway; and transforming the food security and local food economy systems. We are privileged to have assisted in county wide projects of significance such as providing millions of dollars in loan guarantee to ensure the Crescent City Harbor could secure post-tsunami rehabilitation; and to have contributed to the smallest win such as when students organized to have compostable lunch trays across the District.

Mr. Gitlin, this is how we believe we will create a healthier California: when residents come together around values of equity and belonging with a belief all people deserve the best chance to live a long and healthy life. We believe our billboard messages are about just that. It is unfortunate you have chosen to spread messages of hate and divisiveness at a time when we demand our elected leaders foster greater understanding and hope. We are saddened by the letters of vitriol we have received from your supporters who are emboldened by your actions.

The California Endowment stands with Del Norte leaders: Elected, youth, Tribal, immigrants, refugees and residents, who have denounced your hate speech.

As I have said in the beginning of this letter, we support your first amendment right and we respectfully hope you understand our first amendment right to share messages of healing and health. Thank you again for your correspondence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert K. Ross', written in a cursive style.

Robert K. Ross, MD
President & CEO
The California Endowment