

To: Mayor Joe Hogsett and City Council President Vop Osili

We are two of the survivors who told our stories publicly about the sexual harassment and abuse we endured from former Chief Deputy Mayor and Chief of Staff Thomas Cook while we worked for Mayor Joe Hogsett's administration and campaigns. We write today to continue our urgent calls for transparency, accountability, and bold action from the City of Indianapolis to implement stronger sexual harassment and abuse prevention policies, an independent reporting system, and comprehensive support services for survivors.

Lauren Roberts first contacted Mayor Hogsett and several other City officials in May 2017 to report that Cook had abused his position of power over her when she worked as his subordinate on the mayor's 2015 campaign. The City claims to have investigated Lauren's report and says that Cook was reprimanded in October 2017. To this day, Lauren has never received formal notice from the City that it investigated Cook. Further, she has never received documentation of the investigation's findings or of when and how Cook was reprimanded. We request any data and documentation related to this investigation, how it was financed, and the subsequent disciplinary action that the City says it took against Cook.

The City's attempts to investigate and reprimand Cook were not effective. By October 2017, he had already begun making inappropriate contact with another subordinate, Caroline Ellert. These advances continued to escalate and made her uncomfortable enough that she left City employment in February 2019. Cook, who at that time still held his role as the second most powerful person in City government, continued to target Caroline.

The City has stated that Cook was reprimanded for a second time in October 2020. Instead of firing him, the City allowed Cook to resign from his role on his own terms two months later, land a partner position at a law firm, and continue working with the City in the form of lucrative contacts. He also continued to hold a powerful role on the mayor's reelection campaign.

Systems should protect workers when individuals do not or cannot. It is undeniable that the campaign and the City's current sexual harassment policies and reporting systems failed at multiple levels. This failure, as well as the

inaction on the part of the mayor and other powerful people who work for him, allowed Cook's abuse of power to continue unchecked for years.

While we seek transparency and accountability related to our personal cases, there is a larger issue at hand: protecting all employees – regardless of gender – from the harassment and abuse that we experienced. We also want to ensure that there are independent and effective reporting systems in place to protect survivors and hold perpetrators accountable.

We demand that the City take the following steps in the 2025 Budget for the Consolidated City of Indianapolis – Marion County to reform its sexual harassment policies and reporting procedures:

- Hire third-party experts to conduct a formal, independent audit and study to identify the scope of the problem with the City's sexual harassment policies, reporting procedures, and responses to survivors. This audit and study should include testimony from a variety of City and County employees at all levels. It should also include testimony from independent experts in gender-based violence, sexual harassment, workplace discrimination, and human resources.
- Train and educate all City and County employees – not only managers and supervisors – on their rights in the workplace. The City has reported that in 2019, it amended its sexual harassment training for supervisors. Given that in our cases, and in many others, supervisors are the ones harassing subordinates, supervisor training alone is insufficient.
- Provide an independent, third-party entity for survivors to report to when they are ready to come forward about the sexual harassment or abuse they are experiencing. While the City and mayor are protected by a multitude of lawyers and advisors, survivors often do not have the resources to hire their own legal advocates to protect themselves in the reporting process. An independent reporting system would help ease survivors' fears of legal retaliation from their employer.
- Extend no-cost mental health services to survivors. We are proof that it is possible to survive and even overcome the trauma of sexual harassment and abuse, but costly mental health services have been and will continue to be essential for our healing.

This is not an exhaustive list of steps that the City should take to prevent and stop sexual harassment and abuse for its workers. There are other practical and immediate ways that the City can overhaul its policies and reporting process.

Regardless of formal reforms, though, we all have a responsibility to disrupt the culture of silence and victim-blaming that gives rise to sexual harassment in the first place and allows it to continue even after a survivor bravely speaks up, like Lauren did in 2017. Survivors deserve to know their rights, feel safe, and be empowered to report what is happening to them.

We welcome conversations with City officials about our proposals, and we are willing to collaborate on a path forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Caroline Ellert". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Caroline Ellert

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lauren Roberts". The signature is very fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Lauren Roberts