

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**June 6, 2022**

**Mayor Pro Tem Svarzbein Files Code of Conduct Complaint Against Mayor Leaser**

**El Paso, Texas-** On June 6, 2022, Representative and Mayor Pro Tempore filed a Code of Conduct complaint against Mayor Oscar Leaser.

Mayor Pro Tem Svarzbein issues the following statement:

“I first drafted this complaint immediately following the initial incident in February, but I ultimately decided not to file it in the hope that the situation with Mayor Leaser’s inappropriate conduct towards myself and other members of Council would improve. Following Mayor Leaser’s outburst and out of order comments during today’s Special City Council Meeting, I don’t feel that any improvement has occurred, and that is why I am filing this complaint now. People can disagree in politics and healthy discussions are always welcome but it should not turn into a threatening situation against anyone.”

Below is the complaint language in full:

*This is to serve formal notice as per the approved Council Code of Conduct of a violation of the Code of Conduct by Mayor Oscar Leaser. On February 1st, 2022, directly after the meeting on Item 64, I approached Mayor Leaser and Isabel Salcido to express my concern about the manner in which the mayor had failed to conduct the meeting in accordance with the City Council’s Rules of Order by not allowing any additional comments from representatives who had requested to speak. I also wanted to express my disappointment in the mayor failing to call members of council to order during debate. I was so disrupted that I requested that the City Clerk stop my time on the floor to ask for the ability to complete my statement without interruption.*

*I spoke with Mayor Leeser between his position on the dais and Isabel Salcido's position. I told him that I found it disrespectful to Rep. Salcido and to the council to not allow the conversation to continue or to hear her motion. He said I was being disrespectful and that he would start treating me in the same manner Dee Margo used to. I told him I was not trying to disrespect him, but that I was trying to state he was not following our Rules of Order. He told me not to disrespect him. He continued to insist I was being disrespectful and stood up and said "shut your mouth." As I insisted I was seeking clarification about his treatment of the council, he said "keep talking, keep talking" and then "shut your mouth or I will shut it for you". I noticed at this point that he stood up more straight and clenched his right fist. I was concerned about him escalating this conversation to physical violence, and it reminded me about the alleged altercation at Thyme Matters between Mayor Leeser and the husband of a former District 1 City Representative. In order to avoid further escalation, I decided to remove myself from the area.*

*I began to walk towards my desk to pack my belongings and exit council chambers. Mayor Leeser began to follow me in an attempt to 'square up' to me and continued insulting me and being verbally abusive, and I did not feel physically safe. He repeatedly said that I am a joke and that I have no respect from City staff or City Council. As I packed my belongings and was walking towards the exit out of City Hall, he continued following me towards the exit and continuing his verbal assault stating "you [Peter] think you know everything and speak on every item, and you know nothing and the City Council is tired of you and thinks you are a joke." As I reached the exit, he said "you outsmarted yourself and I am going to show everyone what a joke you are". He was breathing heavily at this point and continuing to try to block my path, and I felt in physical danger if he were to follow me all the way outside the Council chambers. I tried to remove myself from the situation by turning around and walking back into the atrium area outside of Council chambers, and thankfully Mayor Leeser there encountered Laura Prine, Tracey Jerome, Karla Nieman, and other staff members, and presumably not wanting to be seen following me, he stopped and remained there to speak with them.*

*Present in the room who witnessed all or part of the interaction were Isabel Salcido, Henry Rivera, Karla Nieman, Laura Prine, Cissy Lizarraga, and Tracey Jerome.*

*I believe several sections of our Code of Conduct were violated by the mayor's conduct and actions during this event and others. Specifically, in pillars 1, 4, and 5. Furthermore the*

*Code of Conduct discusses elected official conduct with one another in public meetings and in private settings.*

*Found on page 4 of the Code of Conduct, the following codes of conduct were violated:*

- Practice civility, professionalism, and decorum during discussions and debate. Keep in mind that criticism of ideas and expression of differing points of view are legitimate elements of a free democracy in action.*
- Refrain from making belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or disparaging comments. No shouting or physical actions that could be construed as threatening will be tolerated.*
- Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches. Officials have a public stage to show how individuals with disparate points of view can find common ground and seek a compromise that benefits the community as a whole.*
- It is the responsibility of the Mayor to maintain order and keep the comments of Officials on track during public meetings. Officials should maintain focus on the current agenda item being discussed. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the Mayor's actions, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason, following parliamentary procedure. The City follows Roberts Rule of Order for meeting management, to the extent they are not in conflict with other City procedural rules and/or orders.*

#### *In Private Settings*

- Continue respectful communications in private. The same level of respect and consideration of differing points of view deemed appropriate for public discussions should be maintained in private conversations.*

*According to the Code of Conduct, the first step in filing a conduct complaint is to visit with the Mayor. However, given that he is the subject of the complaint in this case, I do not feel it would be a fruitful discussion, and I am concerned for my physical well being. I have informed the Alternate Mayor Pro Tempore of Mayor Leeser's behavior and actions toward me that day. Her recommendation was that I write this email to document the situation.*

*Through this letter I am asking for an apology, and I also expect that the Mayor will agree to never again behave in this fashion in a public or private setting with any member of council. If there is an interest in discussion relating to this complaint, please arrange it through Alternate Mayor Pro Tempore Lizarraga.*

*As a final note, I first drafted this complaint immediately following the initial incident in February 2022, but I ultimately decided not to file it in the hope that the situation with Mayor Leeser's inappropriate conduct toward Council would improve. Following Mayor Leeser's outburst and out of order comments during today's Special City Council Meeting, I don't feel that any improvement has occurred, and that is why I am filing this complaint now.*

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