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Board of County Commissioners
Matt Salka, Chair
Elizabeth Philbrick, Vice Chair
Marsha Porter-Norton, Commissioner

1101 East 2nd Ave
Durango, CO 81301
(970)382-6219

May 12, 2026

Mr. Jack Turner
c/o The Code Rights Project
10 Town Plata #283
Durango, CO 81301

Dear Mr. Turner,

We are writing in response to the recent mailer sent by you and the Code Rights Project (CRP), and the ongoing public assertions you have made regarding La Plata County, its staff, and its operations. While public records requests, differing policy perspectives, and community engagement all have an important place in democratic governance, the conclusions you are presenting are consistently incomplete, lack essential context, and advance a narrative that misleads rather than informs the public. In all the voluminous materials provided to the County, there is not one piece of evidence that shows the Commissioners or staff have broken a law, committed an unethical act or otherwise not followed the County's ethics practices.

We have a number of concerns regarding your communications in the following areas:

1. Personal attacks on County employees vs. substantive policy concerns
2. Misrepresentation of the County Attorney's Office budget
3. Misrepresentation of employee compensation
4. Unfounded conflict of interest allegations
5. Misleading claims regarding County property rental
6. Inaccurate characterization of outside counsel expenditures
7. False attribution of credit for County-initiated work
8. A concealed objective: removal of the County Attorney rather than genuine land use reform

Personal Attacks vs. Policy Concerns

Your public messaging has focused less on constructive code language, process recommendations, or participation in formal land use discussions and instead on attacking County staff, making personnel insinuations, and presenting selective interpretations of public documents. A disagreement over policy is not evidence of wrongdoing and recasting it as such misrepresents the facts and misleads residents.

The County Attorney's Office: Budget and Role

Your mailer claims that the County's legal budget is "nearly \$2 million." The actual budget for the County Attorney's office was \$1,879,704 in 2025 and \$1,636,489 for 2026. This is approximately 1.2 percent of the County's total budget, consistent with Eagle and Garfield counties, which are similarly situated. Despite repeated requests, you have not provided the methodology for the counties you selected as comparisons. This selective approach presents an incomplete picture that fails to take into consideration scores of factors that make up any county budget. Comparing counties using only DOLA budget summaries is an imperfect comparison, both oversimplified and deceptive.

It is also important to clarify the important work the County Attorney's Office does in a number of areas. It provides legal services to the Commissioners and six other elected officials and eleven departments, including matters involving contracts, employment, human services, child welfare, public health, land use enforcement, and essential government operations. One of the largest portions of its workload supports child welfare and public health which are critical services for this community. Additionally, La Plata County works closely with the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, a sovereign nation whose legal landscape adds complexity. Any portrayal of the County Attorney's role that omits these facts is inaccurate, and assertions that they direct, or control Board decisions are incorrect.

Employee Compensation

Your recent postcard highlights compensation for two County employees. These figures blend salary, benefits, and employer-paid taxes without distinguishing between them. Presenting total compensation as if it is salary received by an employee is misleading. When salary alone is considered, these positions fall well within appropriate ranges for comparable Colorado jurisdictions. These employees' compensation reflects performance, tenure, and responsibilities. We stand by their work and professionalism and will not entertain unfounded attacks on staff integrity.

Conflict of Interest Allegations

Your suggestion of a conflict of interest because two County employees are married is unfounded. There is no policy violation or legal issue. Their roles, reporting structures, and decisions are independent, and appropriate safeguards are in place. Despite multiple reminders that there has never been a complaint or concern submitted about this arrangement, you continue to imply otherwise. That implication lacks evidence.

County Property Rental

Your reference to the County "renting personal property" is similarly outdated and misleading. When the County determined it would bring its legal services in-house, Sheryl Rogers was selected as the County Attorney. The County rented office space from her for her use in service to the County until a different arrangement was identified. The temporary leased space associated with establishing the in-house County Attorney's Office ended a decade ago (in 2016) once County-owned space became available.

Outside Counsel Expenditures

Your claim that the County spent \$827,000 on outside counsel "often against local businesses" is blatantly wrong. The amount you cite spans six years (roughly \$138,000 per year) and reflects the standard practice, common to County governments statewide, of using outside subject-matter experts where necessary. Further, between 2020 and 2025, La Plata County initiated legal action against a local business only once, based on a citizen complaint-driven land use matter involving serious alleged violations. To suggest such cases happen "often" disregards the CORA documents you obtained or selectively uses public information in ways that distort the truth.

False Attribution of Credit

You have also implied that CRP's efforts are responsible for prompting County work already underway, despite many of these issues being in progress long before CRP's formation. It appears instead that you are attempting to take credit for ongoing initiatives while continuing to assert that County staff or leadership have acted improperly, all without providing evidence of illegal or unethical conduct.

A Hidden Objective: Removal of the County Attorney

Your mailer and public comments also imply that your primary objective is the removal of the County Attorney. That is not a land use code reform proposal, but rather a demand on the Commissioners regarding a personnel decision. In fact, your own website states, "Our mission is to investigate and bring transparency to the application and enforcement of planning and building codes in La Plata County. We aim to identify any patterns of inefficiency, inconsistency, or unfair treatment that may be harming property owners, contractors, and citizens."

If land use code and systems reform is the true goal, the public should be able to review the CRP's proposed code language, process recommendations, and/or evidence of participation in Planning Commission or Board Meetings, where such ideas can be vetted.

Conclusion

This Board remains open to constructive dialogue about improving land use processes and amendments to the existing code. Ten code amendments have been adopted since February 2024, with an additional five amendments in process. We continue the work of governing, which includes balancing property rights, public infrastructure needs, fiscal responsibility, legal defensibility, and community expectations. We are proud of the policies and progress achieved in recent years, including voter-supported initiatives, balanced regulations, and responsiveness to community needs.

What has been presented as a good-faith effort at land use reform reveals, on closer review, a different pattern entirely. The letter targets County employees by name rather than engaging substantive policy concerns, misrepresents both the County Attorney's Office budget and employee compensation figures, and advances conflict of interest allegations without a factual basis to support them. Claims regarding County property rental arrangements are misleading, characterizations of outside counsel expenditures are inaccurate, and credit is claimed for work the County had independently initiated long before your organization existed. Most tellingly, the cumulative weight of

these choices points toward an unstated objective: Not genuine reform of the land use system, but the removal of the County Attorney.

If your goal is to help improve the system, we welcome that conversation. If your goal continues to be to perpetuate misleading narratives, to target individual employees, and advance a political objective without substantiated evidence, the public deserves clarity about that.

The residents of La Plata County are best served by honest, evidence-based engagement, not by campaigns built on innuendo, selective data, and personal attacks on public servants. We have addressed each of the claims made in your mailer and public statements. In every instance, the record does not support your conclusions.

We believe La Plata County residents deserve accurate information with full context, and we believe in robust public policy debate. We do not, however, believe the public benefits from allegations without evidence or from policy disagreements framed as proof of wrongdoing. The work of governing this county continues – responsibly, transparently, and in the interest of all who call La Plata County home.

Sincerely,

LA PLATA COUNTY
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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Chair

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