



CITY OF FORT BRAGG

Incorporated August 5, 1889

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December 22, 2020

Dr. Tom Jackson, Jr.
President, Humboldt State University
1 Harpst Street
Arcata, CA 95521

RE: Proposed realignment of small business development centers in Northern California

Dear President Jackson,

On behalf of the City of Fort Bragg City Council, we respectfully request your assistance asking the Northern California Small Business Development Center (NorCal SBDC) to delay their plan to realign and consolidate SBDCs in the Northern California region. The current SBDC program directors just learned of this restructuring. The NorCal SBDC, operated by the Humboldt State University Foundation (HSF), announced its intention to realign the SBDCs in Northern California in a meeting last week. In furtherance of this plan, it will be releasing an RFP on January 11, 2021 that will encourage applicants to submit a proposal to realign existing SBDCs with a regional model.

West BDC currently receives \$60,000 per year from the US Small Business Administration (SBA) via the NorCal SBDC. The County of Mendocino and our cities have supplemented this modest allocation for many years, securing Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and other public dollars. Additionally, the County of Mendocino supports West BDC with \$32,000 per year, enabling it to run two fully operational locations, one in Ukiah and another here in Fort Bragg. Should the Mendocino Center disappear, it is highly unlikely that local funding would be directed to the consolidated center in Arcata. That will result in a considerable reduction in services to our community.

The host facility, West Center, is recognized for innovative service delivery to our County's small business community. These innovations include, but are not limited to, special programs for disaster resilience (which has been recognized nationally), StartUp Mendocino to ignite a new generation of rural innovators, COVID information and grant administration, special programs and services created for the Latinx community, and a fully-developed TechUp training program for entrepreneurs who have long been without the knowledge they need to drive revenue and expand markets in a global economy. In 2020, West Center has served close to 700 individual business owners with one-on-one counseling and close to 1500 individuals were served with their training webinars. SBDCs play an important role in providing a connection between our community and the Small Business Administration.

We understand for any organization to remain vibrant and relevant they must periodically assess and realign offerings. Our concern is releasing an RFP that could potentially result in a significant reduction of services to small businesses in Mendocino County on the heels of COVID-19. Additional time would allow greater insight into emerging issues around the pandemic-induced recession and the certain to be

policy and program impacts of the new Biden Administration. While specifics are not yet available, their intention to expand small business assistance and rural development has been made clear.

For all of these reasons, we are requesting that NorCal SBDC operated by HSF delay release of the RFP and embark on a transparent stakeholder process factoring in feedback from centers and providing insight into what may be gained or lost in the transition to regional centers.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Bernie Norvell
Mayor

Jessica Morsell-Haye
Vice Mayor

Teresa K. Albin-Smith
Councilmember

Lindy Peters
Councilmember