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Madame Clerk,

It has truly been a calling for me to be in public service, a commitment I've held since I was a young girl. I've often shared the story of speaking at my first public meeting when I was just 14 years old. What started as an interest quickly became a vocation, drawing me in through campaigns, my time as a page in the Rhode Island Senate, political tourism for presidential primaries in New Hampshire, and coordinating debate watches in college. For many years, I served as support staff, never quite having the courage to believe that I could be the candidate or the decision-maker.

The special election in May 2021 in Coventry's fourth district finally gave me that chance. At 28 years old, I was excited to fulfill this lifelong commitment. However, I wasn't prepared for the scale of challenges that awaited me. What I faced as a young, female council president was more than many endure in entire political careers. I inherited a town dealing with 18 months of unreconciled bank statements, negligent town management, three years of late audits, Johnson's Pond in the hands of malicious actors, the Center of New England development at a standstill, no comprehensive community plan, no plan to fix our school buildings, no money allocated to paving roads, broken-down trash trucks, no capital improvement budget, an unstable police department, no playgrounds in town for children, deteriorating water quality in our lakes, no one standing up for residents against developers, no plan for the future of wastewater and stormwater infrastructure, and a mounting structural deficit in the school department.

I am profoundly proud that I have been at the helm to tackle and accomplish a significant turnaround for all of that. I didn't do it alone; there are people in this community who genuinely care and dedicate themselves to the town. That spirit and those partnerships are what sustained me for so long.

It is critical to note that the core leadership team responsible for executing and helping to achieve those significant accomplishments from 2022 through 2024 - the Council President, the Town Manager, and the Town Solicitor - remains the exact same. Yet, suddenly this year, we were painted as "bad people." The result of this engineered chaos is clear: nothing has gotten done for the community since. The opposition is no longer focused on service; they are focused solely on disruption.

In the face of constant public scrutiny, I want to clearly state that I maintain that I have done nothing illegal or violated any town or state laws. Despite the proliferation of false accusations and malicious misinformation, I am confident that time will shed light on the truth of that fact in due course. My focus has always been on ethical governance and the best interests of Coventry's residents. Any "investigations" that come next will demonstrate just that.

Something fundamentally changed this year. With the turn of the calendar to 2025, an atmosphere of hate and anger for its own sake began to take deep root. We've lost our way as a community, becoming so focused on chaos and burning everything to the ground that we forget what makes our democratic process one of the best in the world.

The environment of hostility I have been subjected to is no longer sustainable. It has included threats with obscene sexual violence, threats to my family with the goal of forcing them to move, my husband receiving direct threats at his job to his safety because of my position, threats to kill the entire council, and daily attacks through social media and other platforms targeting my gender, my weight, my looks, and my intelligence.

While I understand public scrutiny is to be expected as a public official, over the last eight months, there have been no boundaries or decorum. I have persisted through more than any person - let alone a public servant volunteering their time for a \$4,000 a year stipend to better their community - should ever have to endure. This constant harassment from a loud minority who lack the courage to sit in these seats themselves has been relentless. The effort to secure over 1,200 signatures for an unsuccessful recall on me earlier this year, rather than simply getting 50 signatures to run against me in an election, speaks volumes about their motives.

This has taken an undeniable and significant toll on my health, my career, and my family. These are priorities that must now take precedence.

Therefore, it is with deep regret that I make the difficult decision to formally resign from the Coventry Town Council, effective immediately. This resignation includes my roles as President of the Council, Chair of the School Building Committee, Chair of the Municipal Fire Commission, member of the Sewer Sub Committee, and Vice President of the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns Board of Directors. I do not make this decision lightly, especially knowing I have the support of my district and a majority of the town. But perhaps most importantly, because this was a job I loved so much.

We were getting somewhere and moving Coventry forward. But now, this town is at a crossroads once again. I implore the silent majority that has supported me behind closed doors to finally stand up to the loud minority that sits behind a keyboard and

claims to speak for all of you. Nothing about this behavior is inviting to potential new residents, commercial developers, prospective business owners, or that of potential educators, public safety professionals, or municipal staff to want to engage with this community. It's why virtually every local election is unopposed and it's what has held Coventry back for decades. It's why you, Madame Clerk, have seen more town managers than you have years working for the Town.

To my remaining council colleagues, I urge you to consider the clear trajectory of these events. If you believe this mob will not eventually come for one of you, or that the "noise" ends with my departure, I sincerely hope you are right. However, I believe you will ultimately regret not taking a definitive stand against what is clearly abhorrent behavior when the opportunity was present. Allowing it to continue because it is the path of least resistance only validates and empowers it. Just because they may be clapping for you today, doesn't mean they won't find a reason to vilify you tomorrow. I am simply tired of being told by my colleagues behind the scenes that I have done nothing wrong and do not deserve this, only to watch their actions publicly support the behavior that is driving me out.

Finally, let my experience serve as a canary in the coal mine for local elected officials across the state. Public service is being fundamentally challenged, and people should expect this kind of chaos and vitriol to penetrate their communities soon, if it hasn't already.

Sincerely,

Hillary V. Lima