

Subject's contact information:

Please file a separate form for each state employee or officer who you believe has violated the Ethics in Public Service Act.

Name: Yoshiko Harden
Agency: Renton Technical College
Division:
Position: President
Phone:
Location: Renton, WA
Subject's Supervisor(s): Board of Trustees Supervisor's Position(s):
Supervisor's Phone:

1. What type of ethics violation(s) are you reporting?

Financial interests in transactions
Assisting in transactions
Special privileges
Use of persons, money, or property for private gain

2. When and where did the ethical violation(s) occur?

Renton Technical College, Renton WA

3. Please describe the ethical violation(s) in detail The more detailed information you provide us, the better we will be able to assess your concerns.

This complaint is primarily about RTC President, Yoshiko Harden, but also involves administrators under her. While nepotism is defined in the RCWs as the hiring of family members within an institution, we ask for an investigation around how cronyism by the President is driving an improper use of state resources, in which the President's friends are rewarded with jobs and contracts over others who are equally or more qualified for certain positions. This puts enormous amounts of state funds into the pockets of her friends and ultimately boosts her standing at the college by surrounding her with hires who will maintain and

promote a favorable view of her. We believe that our assertion is worth investigating as an exploitation of contract and selection processes. As stated in the Washington State Guidelines Regarding Use of State Resources, "When state officers or employees are seen to favor one product over another, it significantly undermines vendor confidence in the agency's or the state's contractor selection process."

In 2022, the President selected her longtime friend to serve as the college's Executive Director of DEI, over the candidate whose qualifications and expertise were superior and obvious in the college's finalist forums. The President made the final selection for this position. We believe that a review of both candidates' application materials will show investigators that the less qualified person, who happened to be the President's personal friend, was selected. After this hire, the President proceeded to make troubling statements around the campus indicating her level of entitlement to state resources, remarking about "my buildings" and "my money" in reference to campus and the college budget.

In 2023, an Associate Dean position opened in the College and Career Pathways department. The individual hired used the President as a reference and made sure to mention to the interview committee that she was friends with the President. This candidate was apprehensively advanced for this position, though it was not even the one she had applied for, and was advanced despite overwhelming department support for the other candidate. Once again, the President held the utmost power in hiring this person. The candidate, who was unqualified for the position, quit abruptly and very soon after hire, leaving the department without the support it needed.

In 2024, the President and Executive Director of VPI hired their friend, [REDACTED], to a speaking engagement for over \$37,000, of which \$30k was paid to him and the rest of the funds were used to purchase his book and security. All parties say that they are longtime friends and [REDACTED] appears to be a close enough family friend of the President's to comfortably post social media photos of himself embracing her daughter. While a \$30k speaking fee is not always unusual, it is normally reserved for well known and very accomplished experts, which [REDACTED] is absolutely not.

[REDACTED] a self published individual, is virtually unheard of and absolutely does not warrant a \$37,000 expenditure. Allow a comparison with renowned experts on race and racism in the US: Dr. Marc Lamont Hill, a famous scholar and media personality who has an impressive publishing record and impactful presence, charges \$20-30k for similar engagements; Linda Sarsour, one of Fortune's 50 greatest leaders and Time Magazine's 100 most influential people in the world, charges \$10,000; Ijeoma Oluo, a renowned New York Times best selling author, was paid \$15,000 by RTC in 2022.

To put this into perspective, several other speakers at RTC were paid a tiny fraction of [REDACTED]'s fee (all documented and available publicly). For example, a Native American elder who was contracted to present for Indigenous People's Day was paid about \$1100 for a very similar engagement. This discrepancy in pay is particularly ugly given that RTC sits on unceded Duwamish territory. It is also ironic as this is the same event where the President took the podium to proclaim that she would not be reciting any land acknowledgments as those are mere words, but that she would like to elevate indigenous peoples through action. What worse action is there than to pay a native elder a pittance while paying one's own friend over \$30,000? While we understand that this complaint should be framed in terms of the RCWs and not one's own sense of morality, we mention this to provide a sense of the broader environment in which the violations are taking place.

After being contracted for tens of thousands of dollars, [REDACTED] used his speaking engagement at RTC as a platform from which to propagandize in the President's favor. He instructed the audience to support the black women in leadership, specifically naming the President and the Executive Director of DEI, both being his friends, as well as the Director's assistant. Obviously, there is nothing in and of itself wrong with this, and it is even the right thing to do in a

country where black women are regularly devalued. However, not all black women in RTC's leadership were given this courtesy by [REDACTED] Glaringly missing from mention was another black woman: [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] please see the next paragraph for more on this. This selectiveness points to an attempt by [REDACTED] to use his platform not for educating RTC students, who were overwhelmingly absent from the event, but to propagandize RTC employees on the President's behalf at a time when she is under scrutiny for a lack of vision and direction for the school. For instance, the vast majority of employees have yet to see her "Strategic Equity Plan" that is due to be approved by the board of trustees.

The President's trend of hiring though favoritism may be moving into the future. Here is an example of a potential contract to be awarded out of favoritism rather than a candidate's qualification: there are multiple women on campus who are afraid to report sexual harassment and misconduct by the Associate Dean of the Library because he is observably close with the President and, like all of us, they fear retaliation and losing their jobs. This man has told numerous people that, "Yo (Yoshiko) is cleaning house"; that the President will fire the Vice President of Instruction and give him the job instead, which would then make him a cabinet member with the power to retaliate against the women who feel victimized by him. It is taken for granted that he will either be appointed or that any selection process for the VPI role will be fixed in his favor. Though this person fails to show up for duties such as tenure meetings and demonstrates a lack of knowledge around logistical and statutory issues concerning key tasks, he remains confident that the President will promote him to VPI. He is so confident about this promise, in fact, that multiple women have reported him having offered his Associate Dean position to them, even though they have nothing to do with libraries and are unqualified for the post.

Here is another example of favoritism informing how state funds are used and on whom: It is standard for DEI Offices to send employees to conferences out of state. What has resulted in questions and scrutiny is the VP of DEI's "invitation only" approach to sending select people to Hawaii for NCORE, a DEI conference. The VP later opened an application process for the school, but only after she determined whether her first picks would be able to make it or not. Among those who went to Hawaii, people brought their family members/partners, utilizing the conference as an opportunity for a family vacation subsidized by state funds.

We end this complaint by acknowledging that it may be weaponized by anti-DEI parties, and we condemn such exploitation in advance. What we love about RTC is our widespread sense of community and commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. It is in the name of justice that we write this complaint, because nobody, not even people from historically marginalized groups, should be above the ethics. This complaint may also be minimized by those who will claim that we seek to undermine the success of leaders of color, so it is important for the record that we support, encourage and elevate several leaders of color on campus, which is one of the positive effects of RTC's increasing diversity and its potential to move beyond tokenism. This complaint is specifically about state processes and funds being exploited by a select few in power to further cronyism, which can delegitimize the strides the college has made toward DEI. We believe that it is essential to call attention to these issues precisely so that we can keep our DEI efforts legitimate, intact and protected, and maintain public trust.

4. Where can we find, or can you provide, additional documentation to support your assertions?

Please mail hard copies of documents to PO Box 40149, Olympia, WA 98504

Yes. Application materials for all candidates are available through HR. Documentation of expenses are available on RTC's dashboards. Photos of [REDACTED] related to the RTC event may be found on his social media. Employees have been documenting as much as possible also, in the event that the evidence disappears.