

January 10th, 2024

Colorado State Senate
President James Coleman
200 E. Colfax Ave, Room 346
Denver, CO 80203

Dear President Coleman,

The Political Workers Guild of Colorado (PWG) is an open-model minority union that represents legislative aides, campaign workers, and political organizers who want to fight for dignity in our workplaces. We are a unit of the Denver Newspaper Guild-Communications Workers of America (TNG-CWA) Local 37074. Please allow this correspondence to serve as a formal complaint against Senator Sonya Jaquez Lewis filed on behalf of past affected staff Li Davis, Luke Doescher, Luis Echeverry, Lacey McGinty, and Molly Stawinoga. For violation of Senate Rule 41(a.5) of the Colorado Senate Rules (the "Rules"). This complaint is being filed pursuant to Rule 43, which requires the signed, written complaint be filed with the Senate President.

We have had several instances of former staffers coming forward to PWG in fear of retaliation for speaking out, and we encourage the committee to consider all documentation with the Office of Legislative and Workplace Relations and the Senate Democratic Leadership as it relates to her behavior. We would ask that if a committee is called and evidence gathered, the identities of former staff remain protected and the committee calls an executive session according to 24-6-402(4). It is our hope that the Senate Democrats will take the following claim and evidence into consideration.

Claim:

The Political Workers Guild is calling for an ethics committee in regard to the violation of Rule 41(a.5);

(a.5) Legislative ethics and official conduct. Legislative office is a trust to be performed with integrity in the public interest. A member is to be respectful of the confidence placed in that member by the other members of the Senate and by the people of the state of Colorado. A member shall respect and comply with the law and shall perform his or her legislative duties at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity and independence of the Senate and of the General Assembly. By personal example and by admonition to colleagues whose behavior may threaten the honor and integrity of the lawmaking body, the member shall watchfully guard the responsibilities of the public office and the responsibilities and duties placed on the member by the Senate. To this end, each member shall be accountable to the Senate for violations of the Rules of the Senate, the Joint Rules of the Senate and the House of Representatives, the Constitution of the state of Colorado, or any provision of the code of ethics set forth in article 18 of title 24, Colorado Revised Statutes.

We believe the evidence shows the violation of Rule 41(a.5) by Senator Jaquez Lewis- particularly the following clauses;

- Integrity in the public interest
- A member shall respect and comply with the law
- ...the member shall watchfully guard the responsibilities of the public office and the responsibilities and duties placed on the member by the Senate

Evidence:

- Wage Theft¹
 - Senator Jaquez Lewis has shown repeated behavior with former staffers by committing wage theft. She then denied doing so as shown in the attached article.
- Non-Disclosure Agreements²
 - Senator Jaquez Lewis had former staffers sign NDAs and one of her recent former staffers signed an NDA despite the practice being illegal.
- Campaign Financing for Non-Campaign Related Work³
 - Senator Jaquez Lewis paid one of her aides to do yard work and fulfill other non-related duties with campaign funds. The aide also identified as Latino.
- Underreporting of campaign funds⁴
- Abuse of power dynamics⁵
 - Senator Jaquez Lewis has continually demoted and promoted her staff without reason.
- Lack of Accountability by Senator Jaquez Lewis and the continuation of repeated behaviors despite the acknowledgment of these actions by leadership
 - Senator Jaquez Lewis has been quoted in several newspapers, never admitting wrongdoing or taking accountability for her actions.
- We are aware other ethics complaints have been filed and we want to acknowledge that we are not the first to make this complaint.⁶

Due to the nature of this complaint, we ask that leadership and a committee, if called, take into consideration the affected staffers when looking into evidence. We know of complaints and documentation, which we encourage the committee to consider, filed with OLWR in 2024, 2023, 2022, and 2021 in regard to behavior by Senator Jaquez Lewis and several letters sent to Senate Leadership. Those we have spoken with who have filed these complaints have largely asked to remain anonymous in fear of retaliation and in protection of their current careers. We have a few former staffers who have come forward and offered to sign this complaint in the hopes that their first-hand accounts of their experiences in Senator Jaquez Lewis' office will provide the committee with needed evidence. Along with this, we have attached a formal complaint that was already filed with Senate Leadership and OLWR. We ask that any press communications to the aggrieved parties who have signed go through the signatory of this letter, Hailey Shea McMoore, and the Political Workers Guild if this letter is made public. We hold the committee to the highest standard of integrity and ask members to protect these former staffers to the best of their ability while still fulfilling their duty, if an investigation is called.

In Solidarity,



¹ <https://www.denverpost.com/2024/04/03/sonya-jaquez-lewis-colorado-senate-democrats-wage-theft-bill/>
<https://coloradosun.com/2024/12/05/sonya-jaquez-lewis-aides-complaints/>,

² <https://coloradosun.com/2024/12/05/sonya-jaquez-lewis-aides-complaints/>, See Page 2 of Attached Complaint, and
<https://www.cpr.org/2024/04/16/former-legislative-aides-workplace-concerns-against-senator-sonya-jaquez-lewis/>

³ See Page 4, 5, and 6 of Attached Complaint, and
<https://coloradosun.com/2025/01/03/sonya-jaquez-lewis-campaign-finance-complaint/>

⁴ Refer to letter sent to Senate Leadership November 15th, 2024 for this violation and others- with regard to the privacy of parties involved

⁵ Boulder County Democratic Party December 17th Resolution Committee Meeting Minutes

⁶ <https://coloradosun.com/2024/12/18/sonya-jaquez-lewis-ethics-complaint/>

Hailey Shea McMoore, Union Steward of Political Workers Guild of Colorado

On behalf of; Li Davis, Luke Doescher, Luis Echeverry, Lacey McGinty, and Molly Stawinoga

Dear President Fenberg, Senator Coleman, and Senator Rodriguez,

Luke Doescher and Luis Echeverry are filing a complaint under the workplace expectations policy against Senator Sonya Jaquez Lewis for deceitful and unethical conduct toward employees in her office. Luke signed a nondisclosure agreement, but Luis did not. After speaking with the Office of Legislative Workplace Relations we believe that these complaints need to be heard despite the nondisclosure agreement. At this point, we would like this complaint to be confidential.

On November 13th without proper discussion or consent, Luis was fired from his position as Junior Aide, and Luke was demoted from his Senior Aide position. Luis did not have the chance to prove himself as an aide and was offered only campaign/labor work.

Despite both of us having positive relationships with Senator Jaquez Lewis, we feel that this situation was handled poorly and in a manner meant to pit us against one another to avoid accountability. We believe that previous incidents with aides demand that we come forward and take action. Our experiences reveal a pattern of dishonesty with aides and potential campaign finance violations.

The mismanagement of aides in her office is a pattern, and issues continue to this day. We believe that her behavior is inappropriate and unacceptable as an elected official, especially given the lack of trust and transparency in her own office. This includes deliberately preventing junior aides from receiving sufficient training and connecting with other aides.

Attached to this document we have compiled a timeline of the situation over the past year that demonstrates a pattern of behavior that violates the integrity of the democratic process and needs to be addressed. We intend to speak up about our experiences and the concerns that we have for the continued mistreatment of aides in the office of Senator Jaquez Lewis. Senator Jaquez Lewis is not a trustworthy boss or legislator, and we believe that she should face consequences for her actions.

Sincerely,
Luke Doescher and Luis Echeverry

Timeline of the situation in the last year:

If Luke's name appears first it is his perspective, if Luis's name appears first it is his.

December of 2023:

- After Rep Dickson resigned Luke still wanted to be an aide at the Capitol, and Senator Sonya Jaquez called me and after about 5 minutes on the phone offered me the position as Senior Legislative aide in her office with a stipend of \$1/hour on top of aide pay - paid by campaign funds. Over the next few days, multiple people reached out to tell me that I shouldn't take the job because she was a horrible boss, and terrible to her aides. Despite these concerns, many people told me that because I am a man I should be ok - apparently issues with aides had particularly impacted female staff in her office. I decided to say yes and the next week I started as her aide.
- On Tuesday, December 12 Luke went into the Capitol for my first day officially as a Senate aide. After entering Sen Jaquez Lewis's office and meeting for the first time, other than our 10-minute phone call, I was promptly asked to sign a nondisclosure agreement. I have not seen this document since then and cannot accurately recall the details of the agreement. Having been an aide for a year at that point I knew that this was not normal, or appropriate behavior.
- On my first day of work, her disorganization as a legislator was immediately apparent. Her email had over 20,000 unread emails including hundreds from constituents for each session going back multiple years. Once again Luke was immediately aware that this was unacceptable behavior for an elected official.

January 2024:

- At the start of the 2024 legislative session, Luke was the Senior legislative aide and our office had a junior aide named Katrina Stroud, and two interns. One intern was Luis Echeverry, a member of the CLLARO(Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy & Research Organization) Capitol Fellowship. We are proud to have worked with this team and despite the numerous challenges of each legislative session, we worked very well together.
- Luke could tell from the way her office was managed that Senator Jaquez Lewis had never had a stable aide situation, many aspects of the virtual and physical systems showed inconsistency and presented challenges without a clear process. She regularly told me how much better I was than her previous aides who couldn't do things right.

March 2024:

- During the legislative session, there were moments when Katrina struggled to complete tasks in the way that SJL wanted them done. Most of these incidents were due to the lack of training and explanation given to her. Senator Jaquez Lewis prohibited Katrina from attending many of the aide training sessions before the session until Luke advocated for her part-time schedule to be aligned so she could attend more training. These trainings during the session were too little too late.
- During the spring, Sen Jaquez Lewis was impressed by an intern in a colleague's office and discussed the possibility with Luke of hiring them as a junior aide and making Katrina an intern. The intern was hired to another office before this could happen, but it came up multiple times that Senator Jaquez Lewis wished that she

could have hired that person. Frequently during the spring Senator Jaquez Lewis would criticize Katrina behind her back to both Luke and Luis.

May 2024:

- Throughout the 2024 legislative session, Luke developed a very friendly and productive relationship with Sen Jaquez Lewis. Despite what I had heard from other people Senator Jaquez Lewis treated me fairly and with kindness throughout the intense moments of the session.
- Despite our personal relationship - During the session, Luke witnessed repeated behavior that demonstrated dishonesty, vindictiveness, and selfishness toward other legislators, bill drafters, and lobbyists. Sen Jaquez Lewis's relationships with numerous members of the Democratic caucus have been damaged by this pattern of behavior. These relationships impacted our work as aides, including when I was asked to follow Senators around the building to figure out who they were meeting with. Additionally, it was challenging for anyone in our office to develop relationships with aides in other offices. Senator Mullica in particular was blamed for numerous situations with bills, leading to SJL's strong support of Valerie Vigil against Senator Mullica's wife in the Adams County Commissioner District 1 democratic primary.
- By the end of the session, there were hundreds of emails to constituents that staff had drafted and developed that had never been approved by SJL to send out. Sen Jaquez Lewis has hundreds of such messages from past sessions. As an employee, the disorganization of her email system was overwhelming and it was impossible to keep track of anything, there were plenty of important messages that fell through the cracks. However, she always would make sure we followed up with people she personally knew.
- When there were emails regarding press coverage of previous aide situations she would direct them out of her legislative email and delete them immediately. Luke witnessed this on multiple occasions. When the articles came out she denied any wrongdoing to Luke and refused to discuss the articles with Katrina and Luis.
- At the end of the legislative session, Luke spoke with Senator Jaquez Lewis who had decided not to keep Katrina on and was interested in having a new junior aide. I strongly advocated for Luis Echeverry to be brought on as the Junior aide because he worked very well in our office, showed consistent improvement and development, and was looking for part-time work. Senator Jaquez Lewis was excited about the idea and we brought it up to Luis in May at some point that there may be more work for him. Katrina was not informed at this point, she definitely wanted to stay on. I'm not sure when Katrina knew she lost her job. It may have been with this email on July 1.

Office of Sen. Jaquez Lewis [REDACTED]
To: Jonathan Brown <jonathan.brown@colleg.gov>

Mon, Jul 1, 2024 at 9:33 AM

Hi Jonathan,
Here is Katrina's time sheet. This will be her last time period.
As I mentioned, Katrina will be exiting the Junior Leg aide position, so she will be expecting some departing paperwork.

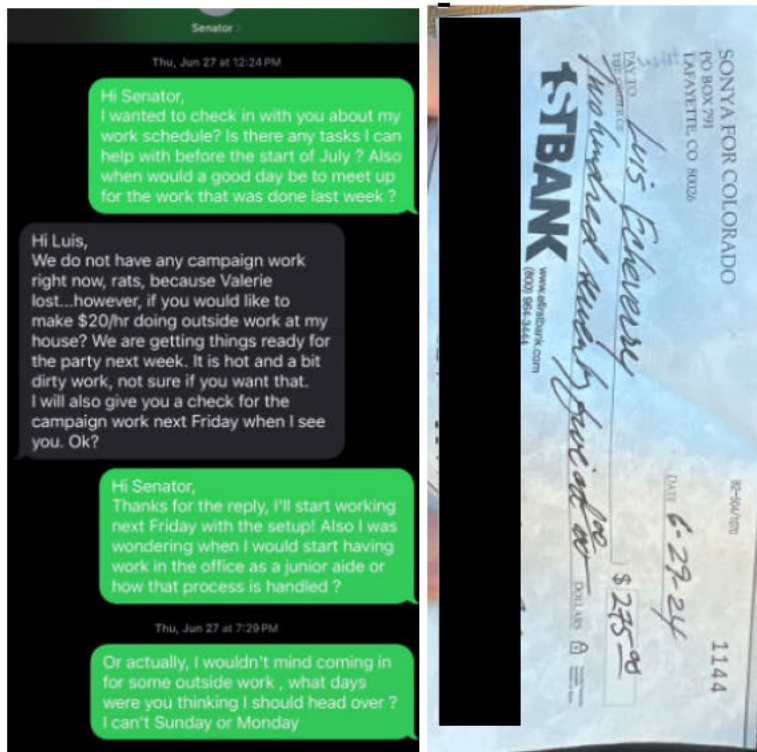
Thank you for all the help with her employment.

Best, Sonya

- While documenting these events it has come to Luke's attention that the stipend he was paid has not been properly reported in campaign finance reports. He was paid \$1/hour which came out to \$790 for the months of January-May. \$185 was reported on the 5/6/24 filing.
- Around this month, Luis had a phone conversation with SJL. During this conversation he was told that he was being offered the Junior Aide Position, he gladly accepted the offer. SJL reiterated to Luis that he shouldn't contact Katrina (the previous Junior Aide), as she didn't want to make the situation "awkward".

June 2024:

- After being offered the Junior Aide position, the only work that was available to Luis was to do some campaign work for Valerie Vigil(Adams County Commissioner primary opponent to Julie Duran Mullica - wife of Sen Mullica). SJL told me that she would pay me out of her pocket \$15/hr for this campaign work. Every time I would receive a paycheck I kept being told that she appreciated my work ethic and that she was glad that I would be her Junior Aide. I was paid for this work by Sonya For Colorado.



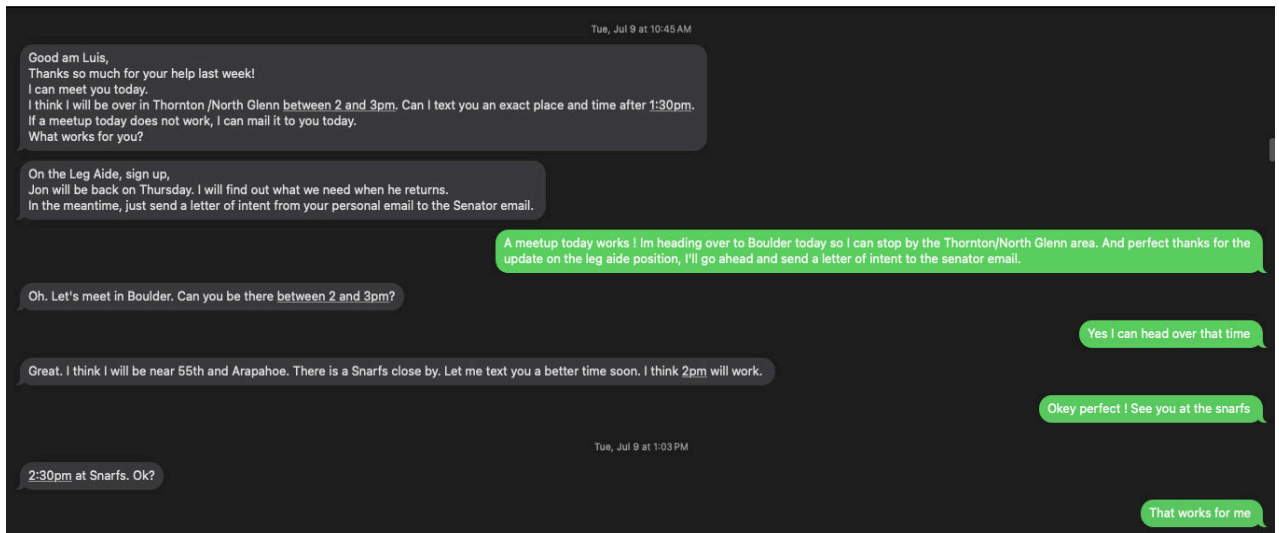
- *NO REPORTED EXPENDITURES FROM SONYA FOR COLORADO 7/1/24 filing*

July 2024:

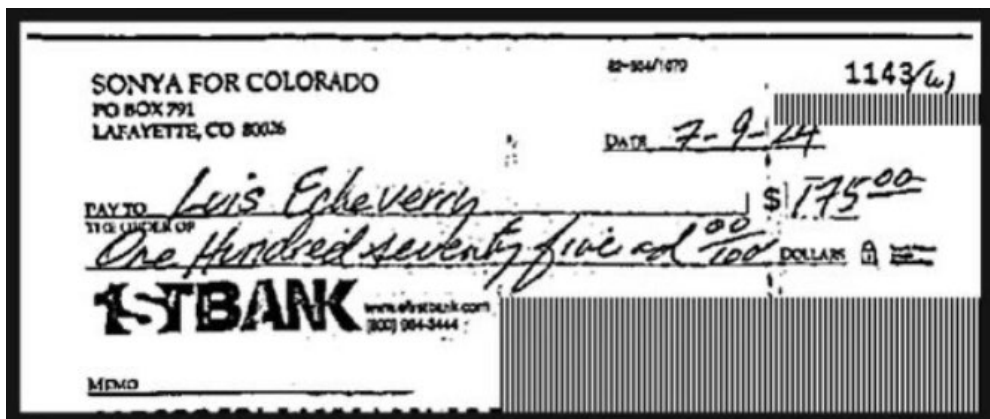
- In July Luke was informed for the first time that his hours would be reduced to a maximum of 18 hours per week.
- Once the campaign work was finished, the only other available work that SJL had offered Luis was to do landscaping work in preparation for her 6th of July Party for Matt Johnston. I was hesitant to take the landscaping work, especially after finishing College and working in an office, I did not expect to do labor work for the Senator. However, I was short on cash and I accepted the offer to demonstrate his work ethic

further to SJL, especially after her commitment to me being her Junior Aide. During the labor work, I was given the task to weed whack her ranch in Erie and to help with the setup for her party. The one thing that did upset me during all of this work, was that SJL had a migrant mother and her daughter, doing this landscape work as well. What made me upset was seeing the daughter not having the proper gloves to pull out the weeds, so I lent my gloves to her.

- At the 6th of July Party, Luis was asked by SJL to come to help be the bartender. He was offered free food for my work and also was given a shoutout from SJL at the party, where she called Luis her Junior Aide. This made him feel that he was now certain the Junior Aide position was going to be mine. He was not paid for this work until July 9th.



- This payment was NOT reported on the proper campaign finance report, or ANY report.



Expenditures Included on Report

Date	Disbursement Type	Expenditure Type	Payee	Address	Employer/Occupation	Amount	Elec Comm	Explanation
7/14/2024	Monetary (Itemized)	Fundraising Expenses	ACTBLUE TECHNICAL SERVICES	366 SUMMER STREET SOMMERVILLE, MA 02144-3132		\$0.60	No	ACTBLUE SERVICE FEE
7/7/2024	Monetary (Itemized)	Fundraising Expenses	ACTBLUE TECHNICAL SERVICES	366 SUMMER STREET SOMMERVILLE, MA 02144-3132		\$10.28	No	ACTBLUE SERVICE FEE

Screenshot of TRACER report August 1, 2024 Sonya for Colorado

- On July 11th, SJL sent Jonathan Brown an email, with her being glad that Luis would be her upcoming Junior Aide and that he would need the necessary paperwork to confirm his hiring.

Luis Echeverry for junior aide position

2 messages

Office of Sen. Jaquez Lewis

Thu, Jul 11, 2024 at 10:23 AM

To: Jonathan Brown <jonathan.brown@coleg.gov>

Cc: CLLARO Fellows <>

Hi Jonathan,

We are ready and very pleased to hire Luis Echeverry for our Junior aide position. He is cced here.

Can you forward him the background paperwork?

Thanks so much, Sonya

August 2024:

- During the special session, Luke and Luis discussed the situation regarding our hours. Luis wanted more stable hours and to get 10-15 hours per week, that was the hours Katrina had in a normal week. Luke told Luis that he was on his side and that Luke had been disappointed with the inconsistency in his hours as well. Working together Luke came up with a plan to give Luis training at least once a week for 1 hour. Luke was asked by Sen Jaquez Lewis to delay these training sessions and then to stop them after just a couple of weeks. This is another example of the outright prevention of training for junior aides in Sen Jaquez Lewis's office.

September 2024:

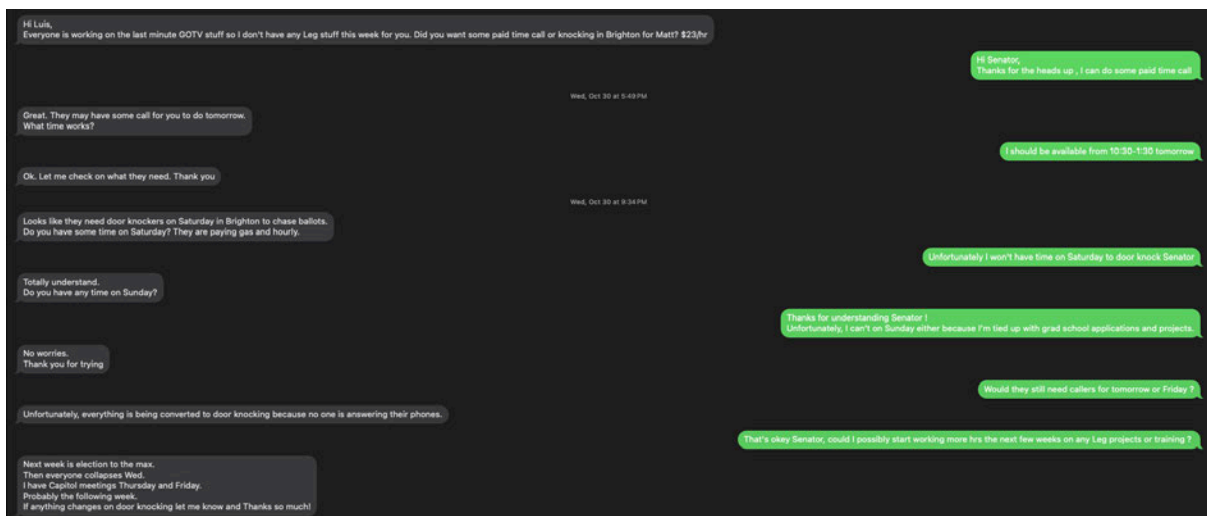
- SJL occasionally asked Luke to tell Luis not to work or to reduce his hours rather than telling him directly, other times she would cancel his hours from the calendar. When Luis took the junior aide job he was under the impression he would have 10-15 hours per week, he was rarely given more than 5 hours and some weeks none at all.
- During the month of September, Luis was only offered a maximum of 10 hrs a week to work. This however did not happen as I had at most worked every week 5 hrs a week and sometimes less. SJL kept reassuring me that once the session started in January, I would be offered more hours of work, which influenced my decision to not look for work elsewhere.

October 2024:

- On October 1st Luke was asked to reach out to Tina Prekaski who was to join us as a legislative intern. She and SJL had met at campaign events during the summer/fall. Luke ended up meeting Tina 2 weeks later for the first time on October 17. She immediately demonstrated herself as a capable intern and qualified to work as an aide if given the chance. I believe that Tina was being paid for her work, there was office work to be done, but it was not being given to Luis.
- On 10/17 SJL, Tina, and Luke had a conversation about the future of staffing the office. Luke was told that the senior aide position was mine if I wanted it. At this time I had submitted my application for graduate school but was waiting for my application to be complete with letters of reference and be reviewed. I discussed the possibility of stepping into a part-time role in the office to pursue more courses should

I be admitted to the program. I understood that becoming a part-time aide would cause issues for Luis since there can only be 1 part-time aide. I did not commit to staying on as a Junior aide or voice that as my preference at any point in this conversation. The topic did not come back up to my attention until November 13th.

- During this period, Luis was impacted significantly. Initially, I was offered at most three hours of work per week, but by the end of the month, my only option was campaign work in Brighton, which I declined due to focusing on my graduate applications. While I agreed to phone campaign work, SJL later informed me it was no longer available. Frustrated by the lack of office work and training opportunities, I inquired about future hours and was told I would need to wait until after the election. As a result, I was left with no hours for his paycheck during this time.



November 2024:

- On Tuesday 11/12 at 6:04 PM Luke received a text from SJL that said “Hi Luke, I need one more day off, so I don’t have anything for you for tomorrow.” A day I had planned to work.
- On Wednesday 11/13 at 10:56 AM, the week after the elections with no prior warning SJL called Luis, to notify him that he would be demoted from his Junior Aide position to an intern/fellowship position. When asked why this happened, she kept repeating that Luke notified her, that he was accepted into Graduate School, and that he would need to take Luis’s part-time Junior Aide job to be able to fund his expenses. After explaining to her my frustrations of this situation and how hard it has been for me to budget my finances given the state of the economy right now, SJL responded, “The economy is actually booming, but if you want to believe the Trump rhetoric go ahead”.
- On Wednesday 11/13 at 11:05 AM Luke received a call from Luis Echeverry where he told me that he had been told he would no longer be a junior aide. But he was told could stay on in a fellowship position for 6-8 hours per week. During this conversation, he detailed his perspective on the series of events that led to his firing before being given a chance to train, work, and prove himself as an aide. The reason

he was given is that “Luke changed his mind and has decided to take your position as Junior aide”. Luke had not made this decision or discussed it with SJL since 10/17

- While on the phone with Luis, Luke went to SJL’s inbox and found this email:

Office of Sen. Jaquez Lewis <[REDACTED]>
To: Jonathan Brown <jonathan.brown@colleg.gov>

Wed, Nov 13, 2024 at 11:35 AM

Hi Jonathan,

I have some staff changes coming as we near the beginning of Legislative Session.

Luke Doescher will be moving to the Junior (part-time) aide position.

And Tina Prekaski, who you met and did the background check recently, will be moving to the Senior Legislative Aide position starting tomorrow, Thursday Nov 14th.

Luis Echeverry will be listed as an office intern. He is waiting to see what his schedule will be.

Can you also prepare the Leg aide badges accordingly and we will be in the office to pick them up next week on Wed 20th.

Thanks so much for all your assistance.

Best Regards, Sonya

- This was the first Luke had heard about me taking the Junior position since 10/17 and I had not yet informed SJL that I had been admitted to grad school. Without my consent, or knowledge I was demoted to the Junior aide role, and Luis was fired. I expected to at least be told, as this decision comes with the loss of my health benefits. Given the relationship I have built with SJL in the past year, I would have expected to be involved in decisions on the future of the office. It was insulting to find out this way.
- After Luke had this conversation with Luis, we both reached out to Jessica Martinez Vasquez and made her aware of the situation. Luke did not hear from SJL until the next morning when she sent me a normal morning message with tasks to start the day.
- On Thursday 11/14 Luke spoke with Jonathan Brown in Senate Services over the phone. He asked if I had spoken with SJL about my loss of benefits, and I said no. He informed me of the situation that I had seen in the email and shared that he had spoken with Senator Jaquez Lewis.
- 11/14 at 11:36 Luke received a text from SJL that said “Hi Luke, I need to plan to transition you to junior aide soon. Are you on health benefits through the senior position?” I responded, “Yes I am - what will happen to Luis if I become the Junior aide?”
- The response came as a phone call, SJL seemed different than normal, and she told me that I would be the junior aide. It was not a question, and I told her that I felt blindsided that I found out from an email from Jonathan and not from her. The conversation quickly turned to my health benefits and how I could keep them through 12/31.
- Later that evening, Luke received a call from Luis after Luis had a conversation with SJL. During their discussion, she refused to take responsibility for rescinding his offer as a junior aide, instead reiterating that Luke wanted the position and saying, “What was I supposed to do, Luis? Luke is more qualified than you.”

- When Luis brought up the CPR news article written about SJL in April, she dismissed it outright, attempting to discredit the author rather than engaging with the content. She also told Luis not to reach out to anyone outside the office about the situation, framing it as a betrayal of trust on his part. This came despite her having promised him the junior aide position since June.
- SJL called Luke around 6:00 PM and told me that Luis was going around talking to Senators, a senator approached her at the retreat and asked if “she had a disgruntled aide” She responded “is their name Tina or Luke?” and then totally denied. She mentioned that Luis was upset and she thought that it was a big mistake that he talked to anyone about it outside the office. She said that “no one will want to hire him if he talks about this”. She said that this is the worst thing he could be doing(talking to others). She mentioned multiple times that she was doing this for me. Luke voiced my frustration with the way Luke was informed about the decisions in this process.
- Luke told her that he thought she should engage Jessica because it is her job to help with aides and she replied that she didn’t trust Jessica with this. She had “bungled” a situation for her and a separate situation for Tom Sullivan before.
- Throughout the evening on 11/14 Luis and Luke talked and recounted directly contradictory stories we had heard from SJL that evening. Luke was told that SJL was looking out for him and Luis was led to believe that all the blame was on Luke. SJL encouraged Luis to talk with Luke. The versions of the story that we each were told put the blame anywhere but on SJL, and we have lost any remaining trust in what she tells us.
- The morning of 11/15/24 Luke and Luis submit this complaint.

Colorado state senator removed from wage-theft bill after accusation she refused to pay staffer

Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis, who also lost committee chair position, denies attempting to withhold pay



State Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis addresses other senators in the Senate chambers at the Colorado State Capitol on March 23, 2022, in Denver. (Photo by Helen H. Richardson/The Denver Post)



By **NICK COLTRAIN** | ncoltrain@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

UPDATED: April 3, 2024 at 7:38 AM MDT

State Sen. [Sonya Jaquez Lewis](#) lost her position chairing a powerful Senate committee and was removed from a bill concerning wage theft — both decisions made by top Democrats earlier this year after she allegedly refused to pay an employee working under her.

Records obtained by The Denver Post show that the senator's resistance to signing off on an aide's time card in December was among concerns raised by her party's leadership over the last year. Jaquez Lewis, a Longmont Democrat, also was

admonished months earlier by Senate leadership for “concerning” behavior reported by staff and other members of the legislature, according to email records.

Early in this year’s session, in January, a Senate leader quietly removed her as chair of the chamber’s Local Government and Housing Committee, though she remains a member of the panel. Committee chairs help steer — or stall — legislation as bills move through the General Assembly, and they are powerful positions when it comes to setting state policy.

Jaquez Lewis was also an initial prime sponsor of [House Bill 1008](#), a bill aimed at [preventing wage theft](#) in the construction industry, that was introduced in early January. By February, House Majority Leader Monica Duran had removed Jaquez Lewis’s name from the bill.

Duran did so, she said in an interview Tuesday, because she “felt it would not be appropriate” to have Jaquez Lewis carrying it. Refusing to pay an employee for work done could have led to claims of wage theft if the aide ended up going unpaid for their work.

“I wanted that focus to stay on the bill, not on Sen. Jaquez Lewis,” Duran said. “Nor did I feel it was appropriate to have someone who’s being questioned — being asked about wage theft — to be on the wage theft bill.”

In an interview Tuesday afternoon, Jaquez Lewis denied refusing to sign anyone’s timesheet. She said she was traveling when the incident happened and tried to sign off on it when she could, but it had already been handled internally.

Senate President Steve Fenberg, a Boulder Democrat, would eventually sign off on the aide’s time card, according to records obtained through the Colorado Open Records Act.

Underscoring the rarity of the issue, email records show that Fenberg had to ask staff if it was in his power as Senate president to OK the timesheet if the aide’s supervising senator “refuses” to sign off.

In a brief interview, Fenberg said he chose the word “refuses” because it reflected his understanding of the event. He otherwise declined to discuss the incident, citing workplace confidentiality requirements.

Records show Fenberg also had previously warned Jaquez Lewis about her alleged behavior toward staff members.

In September, Fenberg wrote to Jaquez Lewis that several staff members and legislators “witnessed behavior they found concerning,” according to an email obtained through a records request. While he did not specify the behavior at issue in

that email, Fenberg wrote that it was “similar to the issues” previously discussed with her.

“For a staff member to not feel respected and safe in the workplace is never okay and this is something I hope you will prioritize improving upon,” Fenberg wrote to Jaquez Lewis.

He also told her in that email that Senate staff would not help her with vetting or placing any new aides in her office for the 2024 legislative session.

“I don’t want to put caucus staff in a position where they’re recruiting and encouraging someone to work in an office while not being able to disclose to them the concerns that have previously been raised,” Fenberg wrote.

Jaquez Lewis said Tuesday that she could not recall that message and asked a reporter if she was included among the recipients. The email’s header indicates it was addressed to her personal email address.

“It seems to me that if something has occurred, there should be specifics that are out there,” Jaquez Lewis said. “Because I’d like to know what they are.”

She suggested that she was “learning something new” when told about the email.

Jaquez Lewis was first elected to the Colorado House in 2018 and then the Senate in 2020. She won her heavily Democratic Senate district with 68% of the vote.

The aide who submitted the timesheet in question had resigned from Jaquez Lewis’ staff during that pay period. The resignation letter was withheld by the Senate under open records law based on a provision that bars the release of documents used in inquiries or complaints made under the workplace expectations policy. That is separate from workplace harassment policy, which is reserved for more serious allegations.

The records do not name the former aide, and The Post is not identifying the person to protect their identity. The former aide declined an interview request.

Jaquez Lewis said she never heard any workplace complaints.

She also said she stepped down from the committee chair seat because she’s working on a voter and Democratic Party recruitment initiative in Boulder and Weld counties, as well as looking toward reelection in November.

Senate Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez, who sets the committee assignments, declined to comment on the change.

Duran, who is leading the construction wage theft bill, said members sometimes leave bills because of workload or other issues, but this is the first time she's removed someone so that there wouldn't be "a cloud" hanging over the policy.

Duran said she had that conversation with Jaquez Lewis directly and let her know why she was being removed. But Jaquez Lewis said she wasn't aware of those concerns.

"I don't know why (Duran) would say that," Jaquez Lewis said. "We haven't talked about it."

NEWS: POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Colorado senator barred from having state-paid aides after repeated complaints from staffers

State Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis of Longmont, accused in the past of mistreating her legislative aides, is the subject of a new workplace misconduct complaint filed by two of her most recent subordinates



Jesse Paul

4:01 AM MST on Dec 5, 2024 Updated 9:28 PM MST on Jan 7, 2025



Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis, D-Boulder County, speaks at a town hall on Feb. 8, 2023, at the First Baptist Church in Denver where Democrats' gun violence prevention measures were discussed. (Olivia Sun, The Colorado Sun via Report for America)



Colorado Senate leaders Tuesday barred a Democratic state lawmaker from having state-paid aides after two of her most recent staffers filed a workplace misconduct complaint claiming she used one of them to do chores like yard work and bartend at a party at her home.

The complaint marks the second time in the past year state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis of Longmont has been accused of mistreating her legislative aides.

“This is now clearly a recurring issue,” outgoing Senate President Steve Fenberg, D-Boulder, said in a letter to Jaquez Lewis. “In good conscience we cannot support placing an aide in your office while this behavior and complaints continue.”

The workplace misconduct complaint filed Nov. 15 with the legislature’s Office of Legislative Workplace Relations alleges that Jaquez Lewis paid the aide who did the landscaping work and tended bar over the summer with a check from her campaign’s bank account. She also allegedly used campaign money to pay the same aide for knocking on doors on behalf of an Adams County commissioner candidate who was running in the Democratic primary against the wife of one of Jaquez Lewis’ intraparty legislative rivals.

The payments, documented in the complaint with copies of checks written by Jaquez Lewis from her “Sonya For Colorado” campaign’s bank account, were never reported on



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TRACER, the state's campaign finance website. Colorado law requires candidate committees to report and itemize expenditures of \$20 or more, including the name and address of the payee and the purpose of the expense.

Colorado candidates are prohibited from using campaign funds for “personal purposes not reasonably related to the election of the candidate.” They also are barred from using their campaign accounts to donate to other campaigns.

Jaquez Lewis ran for reelection this year and easily secured a second four-year term. Her district includes parts of Boulder, Weld and Broomfield counties.

In a written statement Wednesday, Jaquez Lewis wished the aides who filed the complaint well.

“Out of respect to those employees’ privacy, I do not wish to comment in detail on HR matters,” she said. “I will note that all campaign work by my staff this cycle was the choice of those individuals and was fully compensated. That compensation is reflected in checks that they were paid. I regret that there was an oversight in filing these payments in TRACER. I am amending the reports to reflect these payments.”



Colorado Gov. Jared Polis, front center, is applauded by, state Sen. Julie Gonzales, far left, state Rep. Brianna Titone, second from left, Lt. Gov. Dianne Primavera, third from left, state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis and state Rep. Meg Froelich after he signed the first of three bills that enshrined protections for abortion and gender-affirming care procedures and

medications during a ceremony with bill sponsors and supporters, Friday, April 14, 2023, in the Colorado Capitol in Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Jaquez Lewis said the work “benefited me by allowing me to interface with donors and further my political support.”

The senator added that she looks forward to working with the new leadership in the Senate.

Jaquez Lewis can still hire Capitol aides and pay their wages using money raised by her campaign. State law allows campaign funds to be used for “any expenses that are directly related to such person’s official duties as an elected official,” and lawmakers frequently supplement their aides’ pay with campaign dollars, though that compensation must be reported to the state.

Still, the ruling barring Jaquez Lewis from having state-paid staffers is highly unusual.

Each lawmaker is allocated a **set number of aide hours** each year. Aides were paid \$23 an hour during the last legislative session. The aides hired by legislators are often college students or recent graduates who are looking to find mentors and get their foot in the door in politics.

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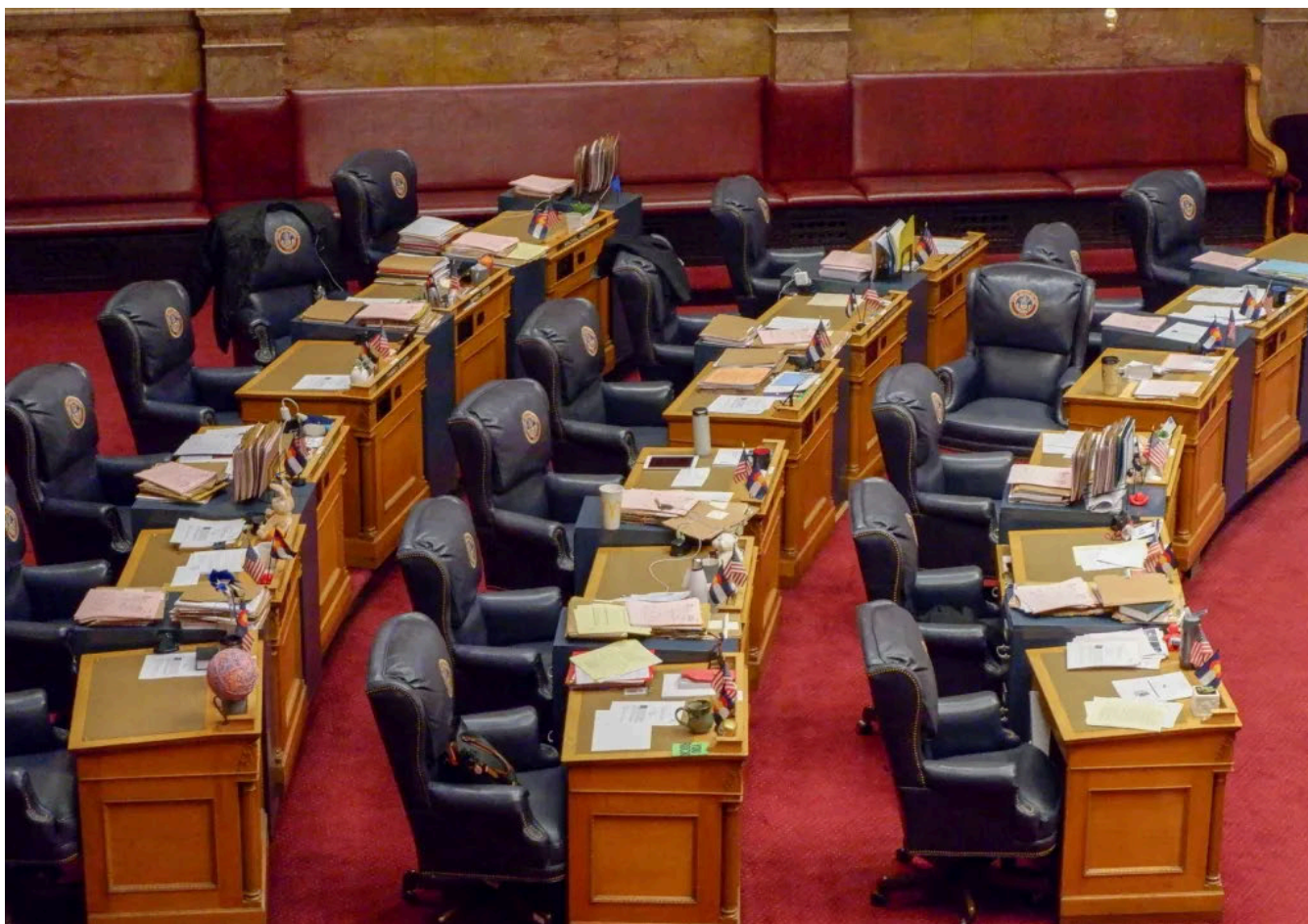


While there have been a number of disputes between lawmakers and their aides, The Colorado Sun couldn’t find evidence of another time in the past decade where a legislator was prohibited from having an aide paid for by the state. Jaquez Lewis appears to be the only sitting lawmaker who is restricted from having state-paid staffers.

Jaquez Lewis was notified of the aide decision in an email sent to her by Fenberg, who leaves office in January. Incoming Senate President James Coleman and Senate Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez, both Denver Democrats, also signed the message.

“We have recently received new concerns about the management and treatment of legislative aides in your office,” Fenberg wrote in the email obtained by The Sun. “President-elect Coleman, Majority Leader Rodriguez, and I take these concerns very seriously and want to do everything we can to facilitate a respectful and supported work environment for legislative aides and staff.”

Fenberg warned Jaquez Lewis not to retaliate against past aides or interns, or anyone else working at the Capitol.



The Colorado Senate at the Colorado Capitol in Denver, Colorado, on Monday, April 22, 2019. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

“Engaging in any retaliatory behavior may constitute a violation of the **Workplace Expectations policy**,” he said.

The aides provided their complaint, which was filed confidentially with legislative leaders, to The Sun on the condition of anonymity. They said they fear retaliation from Jaquez Lewis and her allies and that their futures in Democratic politics could be harmed by speaking out.

The complaint was forwarded to the top Democrats in the Senate.

“I’m just hoping that there’s at least some accountability towards all of this,” said the aide who was paid with a check from the campaign to do yard work and serve drinks at a July 6 party at Jaquez Lewis’ house.

The aide, who is in graduate school, said he felt pressured to do the yard work and bartending, and to campaign for Democrat Valerie Vigil in the Adams County commissioner’s race primary this year. (**Vigil lost to Julie Duran Mullica**, who won the general election. She’s married to Democratic Sen. Kyle Mullica.) He needed the money and said he wasn’t getting enough legislative work hours from Jaquez Lewis.

The aide worried that if he didn’t accept the side jobs, Jaquez Lewis wouldn’t promote him after working for her during the 2024 legislative session as an intern.



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The Colorado Capitol's gold dome in Denver, Colorado, photographed on Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2024. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

“I wouldn’t have taken the landscaping work,” he said. “I felt like I had to do this kind of work to prove myself.”

The aide, who is Latino, said he was also troubled that Jaquez Lewis asked him — and no one else in her office — to do yard work.

“It felt really racially motivated,” he said. “Why was I, the only Latino junior aide, offered this but no office work at all?”

Aides typically work every day during the legislative session, which spans early January to early May, but are offered limited hours during the interim.

After the campaign, landscaping and bartending work, the staffer said he was promoted. But in November, the promotion was rescinded and now he is out of a job.

The second aide who signed onto the complaint also was demoted around the time the complaint was filed. That ended his roughly yearlong working relationship with Jaquez

Lewis, which began with her immediately asking him to sign a nondisclosure agreement. He said he was speaking out now because of how Jaquez Lewis treated his colleague.

The aide, who is also a student, told The Sun that he worked well with the senator at first and wondered why previous staffers had complained about their experiences with her. Over time, however, that changed.



The Senate chamber in the State Capitol on Wednesday, Jan. 24, 2024, in Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

The aide wrote in the complaint that he “witnessed repeated behavior that demonstrated dishonesty, vindictiveness and selfishness toward other legislators, bill drafters, and lobbyists.” He also said that he “was asked to follow senators around the building to figure out who they were meeting with.”

The second aide quit Tuesday.

In her statement, Jaquez Lewis said she “certainly did not intend to mislead or hurt anyone.”

“These employees are all good people and I hope for the very best for them,” she said.

The November complaint was not the first time Jaquez Lewis had been accused of mistreating her staffers.

At the start of this year, the senator **was removed as chair** of the Senate Local Government and Housing Committee and blocked from serving as a lead sponsor of a wage theft bill following accusations that she refused to pay one of her aides.

In April, Colorado Public Radio **reported** that four of Jaquez Lewis' former staffers told the news outlet that "she withheld wages, set unreasonably demanding work schedules, and attempted to prevent them from communicating with other people in the Democratic political sphere."

The aides and a former campaign manager who spoke to CPR were not the same people who filed the recent complaint against the senator.

Jaquez Lewis was first elected to the legislature in 2018 as a state representative. She was elected to her first term in the Senate in 2020 and then reelected to a final, four-year term in November, winning the race in Senate District 17 by a roughly 2-to-1 margin.

The 2025 legislative session begins on Jan. 8.



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Former legislative aides lay out workplace concerns against state Senator



By Bente Birkeland · Apr. 16, 2024, 4:00 am

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Four former employees of a first-term Democratic state senator have told CPR News she withheld wages, set unreasonably demanding work schedules, and attempted to prevent them from communicating with other people in the Democratic political sphere.

Longmont Democratic Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis' alleged treatment of her employees has had consequences for her work at the state capitol. Last spring, after a former aide wrote Senate leaders with a list of concerns about what she described as a "toxic" workplace and pressure to "operate in an untruthful manner." Jaquez Lewis was barred from using Democratic Senate staff to assist in hiring her aides, a decision [first reported by the Denver Post](#).

"If there are complaints and they are serious, then we absolutely do take action," Senate President Steve Fenberg told CPR News. However, he said he's not allowed to talk about individual cases.

Jaquez Lewis declined to comment on Fenberg's decision. In a written statement to CPR News, she said being a state legislator is the most important and hardest job she's ever done.

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In January, Senate Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez removed Jaquez Lewis as chair of the Senate Local Government and Housing Committee. He declined to comment when asked by CPR News to confirm whether it was a response to her alleged treatment of staff.

Jaquez Lewis still serves on the committee and also sits on the Health and Human Services Committee.

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resigning

Jaquez Lewis' trouble with aides has continued past last spring's letter to Senate leaders.

In late 2023, Jaquez Lewis appeared to use the threat of legal action to try to pressure a different aide into submitting a false resignation letter, according to documents, text messages from Jaquez Lewis, and phone calls between the senator and the aide, as reviewed by CPR News.

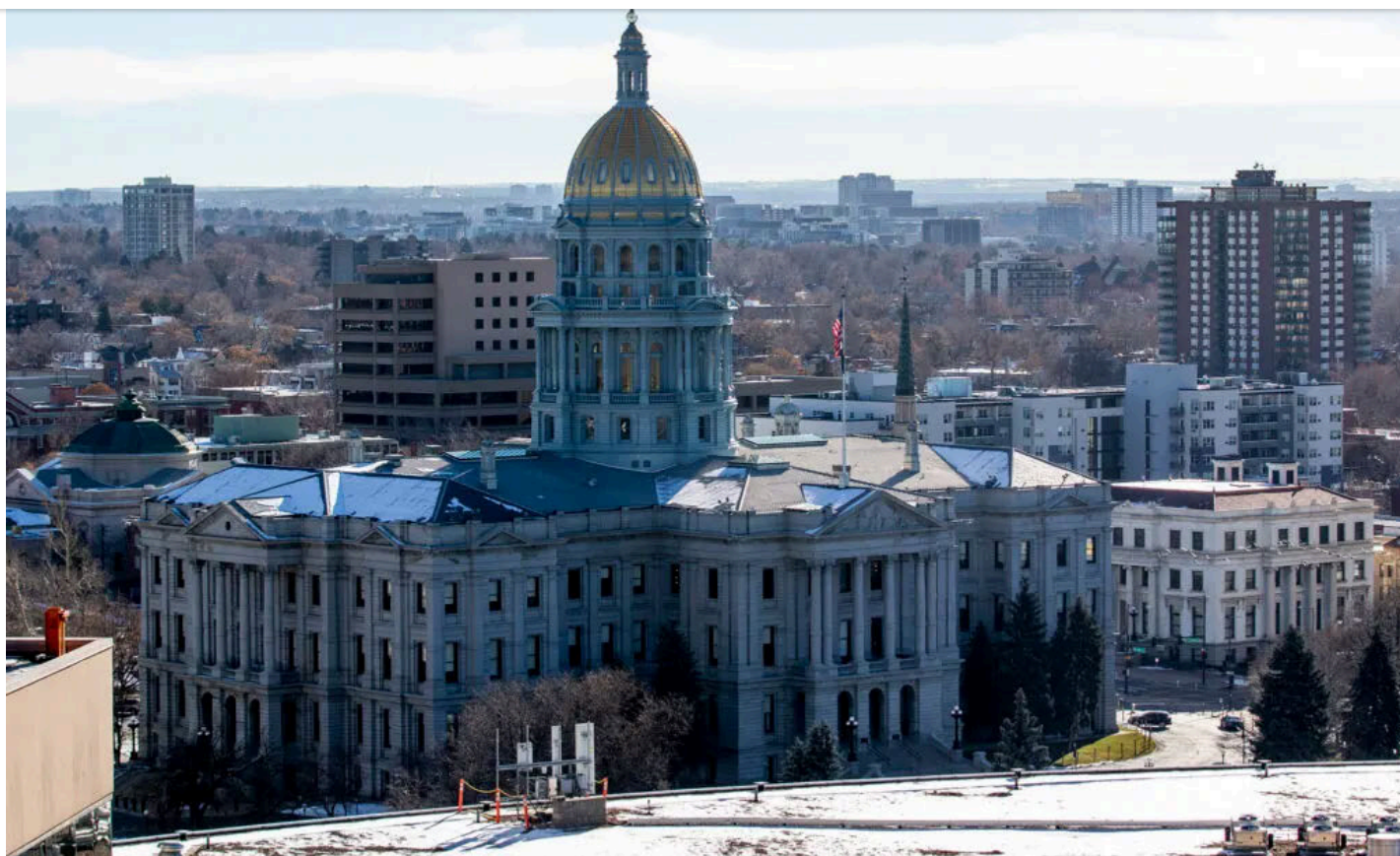
The aide's original letter of resignation, which they submitted to legislative staff and emailed to the senator, stated they were leaving due to "concerns about the work environment and its impact on my well-being."

The aide wrote in a separate letter to Senate leaders that Jaquez Lewis had tried to isolate them from colleagues by encouraging the aide not to work in person and instructing the aide not to reach out directly to Senate staff, which resulted in delayed healthcare and benefits.

CPR News spoke with the former aide who asked not to be identified by name or gender out of concern it could lead to professional retaliation from Jaquez Lewis.

In an interview with CPR News, Jaquez Lewis said she had no comment on the aide's allegations, however, she did provide a general written statement.

"The Capitol is a very stressful place. When someone is leading the charge on an issue, the dialogue can become amplified. Legislators and staff can disagree in the heat of the moment," said Jaquez Lewis.

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The Colorado State Capitol building, seen from atop the downtown Sheraton hotel. Dec. 29, 2023.

In a text message viewed by CPR News, Jaquez Lewis told the employee that the original resignation letter had been accidentally deleted from her inbox and asked them to resubmit a different version, attributing the resignation to transportation concerns.

Jaquez Lewis sent the proposed resignation letter in a text to the aide, which CPR News has viewed. It states, in part: “Unfortunately, I have realized that without having a car, coming into the Capitol every day will become too much of a hardship. I did not realize how difficult the commute would be.”

In a phone call, the senator also accused the aide of violating a non-disclosure agreement because they told a Democratic Senate staffer they planned to resign before talking with her. CPR News has listened to a recording of the call.

Messages between the Senator and aide suggest she used the threat of legal action to pressure them to submit the ghostwritten resignation letter.

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Lewis texted the aide. Once received, I can let my attorney know that no other action is required on the Non-disclosure/ Confidentiality agreement issue. All will be closed. This email is needed Today.”

The aide did not submit the resignation letter written by Jaquez Lewis and said the senator did not pursue the claim that the aide had violated the NDA. Separately, President Fenberg ended up taking the unusual step of signing off on the aide’s final timesheet because Jaquez Lewis failed to do so.

Jaquez Lewis told CPR News she had no comment on that particular situation, but provided a letter from the office of workplace relations from January that said she has not been the subject of a formal complaint.

“The Senator also indicated that she wishes for her staff to be happy, healthy, and engaged. She requested that OLWR (Office of Legislative Workplace Relations) work with her and her team to ensure that everyone feels adequately supported,” wrote the office’s director Ben FitzSimons in the letter.

Former aide’s concerns echoed by other past employees

Three other former employees of Jaquez Lewis, two former aides, and a former campaign manager, told CPR News they also experienced a range of problems while working for her, from being pressured to work while sick to, in some cases, being asked to misrepresent aspects of her legislative work. Two of the former employees said Jaquez Lewis did not fully pay them for their work.

“She rises up by not paying the people below her,” said former campaign manager Lacy McGinty. “I wanted to say something sooner. I wanted to tell the media all about this, but at this point, what did I have to gain, 300 dollars?”

McGinty quit Jaquez Lewis’ 2020 Senate campaign primarily over a disagreement about whether she could take a day off after working several long weeks leading up to the local caucuses. She provided CPR News with documents showing Jaquez Lewis refused to fully pay her final invoice because she felt McGinty had failed to make herself adequately available.

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allegations or allegations from other aides, but stated, "If I've been the cause of any hurt to anyone, I'm truly sorry for that. It's not who I am and I want staff that I work with to be happy, healthy, and engaged."

Legislative aides play an integral role at the statehouse. Every lawmaker is allocated money to staff their offices, with some using campaign funds to increase wages or hire additional aides. Their responsibilities range from administrative duties and office management to interacting with constituents and working on policy. In recent years aides [have organized to get increased wages and benefits](#).



Read: [Colorado legislative aides at odds with Capitol leadership over wage increase](#)

Fenberg said in general lawmakers must be held to a high standard in their treatment of staff. "It's our responsibility to treat everyone with respect and to make sure that there's a workplace that we're proud of and that people feel respected in and safe."

He added that accountability is important too, although the tools for official sanctions are somewhat limited since each lawmaker is individually elected and doesn't have a traditional boss.

"Sometimes that accountability isn't something that everyone is going to see, but could be internal and is based on what we think is best to resolve a situation and to correct something," said Fenberg. He added that when a complaint is found to have merit, "We absolutely take action as swift as possible."

House Majority Leader Monica Duran told CPR News she removed Jaquez Lewis from [a wage theft bill](#) they were both sponsoring this session after she heard Fenberg had had to sign the former aide's final paycheck.

"Our aides are here, they're doing a job for us, making sure that we can do our job that we are elected to do. And it's extremely important that they're not only valued and respected but that they get paid for the work that they're doing. No questions asked," said Duran.

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unaware of any staff who were not paid what they were owed.

Jaquez Lewis was elected to the state Senate in 2020 after serving a term in the House. She's currently running for reelection.

As a trained pharmacist, she's one of the only medical professionals currently serving in the state legislature. During her time in the Senate, Jaquez Lewis has worked on reducing health care costs, has helped pass stricter gun laws, and sponsored legislation to preserve access to legal abortion. She's a member of the legislature's LGBTQ caucus and the Colorado Democratic Latino caucus.

Denice Walker has worked for Jaquez Lewis for the last six years in various roles, including as an intern this session. Walker said she's generally worked really well with the other employees of the senator, noting at 72 years old, "I'm older than most of them. I'm more like the grandparent."

"I've seen aides come and go. It's a high-pressure place to work, but what I've been most impressed with is the Senator's passion and commitment to passing good legislation," Walker told CPR News. "She's not afraid to take on hard legislative policy and sometimes that means taking on powerful people and companies."

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State Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis, addresses abortion rights supporters gathered on the state Capitol steps in Denver on Tuesday, May 3, 2022, after a leaked draft opinion from the U.S. Supreme Court called for overturning Roe vs. Wade.

Use of non-disclosure agreements not common at the Capitol

Jaquez Lewis' former legislative aide said they weren't concerned when they signed the NDA at the start of her employment, which they remembered as being focused on not sharing sensitive legislative information.

But in the call reviewed by CPR News, Jaquez Lewis told the aide the agreement required them to speak with her first about any concerns. She told the aide the NDA was necessary because of situations in the past where people talked to other legislative aides and staff and said they weren't happy.

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encouraged when she was first elected into the House.

CPR News has not been able to review the NDA. However, [a state law](#) that went into effect on August 2, 2023, bans agreements that prevent government employees from disclosing workplace conditions. The aide said they signed the NDA in September.

“The statute clearly says that the state cannot, as a condition of employment, require an employee to sign an agreement prohibiting them from disclosing factual circumstances regarding their employment to another person,” said Jeff Roberts, head of the non-profit Colorado Freedom of Information Coalition.

President Fenberg said in the last several years he directed Democratic senators not to use NDAs with their staff but does not have the power to ban them. He said he was unaware that Jaquez Lewis was using them.

“I think there are aspects (of the job) that members and staff are obviously expected to have discretion over. There are some things that are sensitive or confidential,” said Fenberg. But “in the traditional sense of an NDA for a workplace, I don't think those are appropriate.”

The Political Workers Guild of Colorado, which represents legislative aides at the state capitol said NDAs are rare.

“We hope with the new legislation about NDAs, that offices that do choose to utilize them do so under the full scope of that legislation,” said Hailey McMoore, a former aide, who currently serves on the guild’s leadership team.

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NEWS: POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Election officials advance campaign finance complaint against state senator prompted by Colorado Sun reporting

State elections officials said the complaint filed against Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis “identified one or more potential violations of Colorado campaign finance law”



Jesse Paul

10:46 AM MST on Jan 3, 2025



State Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis during the swearing-in ceremony, Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2023, at the Colorado State Capitol in Denver. (Hugh Carey, The Colorado Sun)

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State elections officials have advanced a **campaign finance complaint** filed last month against state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis that was prompted by The Colorado Sun's **reporting**.

The Colorado Secretary of State's Office said the complaint filed by a conservative activist against the Longmont Democrat "identified one or more potential violations of Colorado

campaign finance law, and alleged sufficient facts, that if later found true, would support a factual and legal basis for the alleged violations.”

The office gave Jaquez Lewis until Monday to reply to the complaint by either curing the alleged violations or refuting them.

The complaint, filed by Cory Gaines, alleges that Jaquez Lewis used campaign contributions for personal purposes not reasonably related to her campaign, made a prohibited contribution to another candidate committee and failed to report contributions and expenditures.

Gaines said he learned about the possible violations through a Dec. 5 [story in The Sun](#) about Jaquez Lewis’ alleged mistreatment of her Capitol aides. The Colorado Secretary of State’s Office wrote in a Dec. 19 letter that the story “could establish that (Jaquez Lewis) violated Colorado campaign finance law.”

The Sun reported in early December that two of Jaquez Lewis’ most recent Capitol staffers filed a workplace misconduct complaint in November claiming she used one of them to do chores like yard work and bartending at a party at her home, and paid the staffer with a check from her campaign’s bank account.



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Jaquez Lewis also allegedly used campaign money to pay the same aide for knocking on doors on behalf of an Adams County commissioner candidate who was running in the Democratic primary against the wife of one of her intraparty legislative rivals.

The payments, documented in the workplace misconduct complaint with copies of checks written by Jaquez Lewis from her “Sonya For Colorado” campaign bank account, weren’t reported at the time on TRACER, the state’s campaign finance website. Colorado law requires candidate committees to report and itemize expenditures of \$20 or more, including the name and address of the payee and the purpose of the expense.

After being contacted by The Sun, Jaquez Lewis amended her campaign finance reports to disclose the payments.

Still, Colorado candidates are prohibited from using campaign funds for “personal purposes not reasonably related to the election of the candidate.” They also are barred from using their campaign accounts to donate to other campaigns, either directly or through in-kind contributions.

In a written statement Thursday, Jaquez Lewis denied any wrongdoing. She said the July 6 event her aide bartended at was a campaign fundraiser, not a personal event.



Colorado state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis gestures as she speaks before Colorado Gov. Jared Polis signed four gun control bills, Friday, April 28, 2023, in the State Capitol in Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

Jaquez Lewis' campaign reported one donation July 6 — a \$200 contribution from a Jamestown woman. But her leadership committee, Sonya for Dems, reported 11 donations on that day.

"I have substantially complied with Colorado campaign law," she said in her statement Thursday. "I never used campaign funds for personal purposes. The allegations suggesting otherwise are wrong and all work performed was to set up a fundraising event at my home. I had no intent to mislead the electorate or any election officials. When I learned of the mistake from a reporter, I took corrective action."

She said that the money she paid her aide to knock on doors on behalf of an Adams County commissioner candidate mistakenly came from her campaign when she meant for it to come from her leadership committee, from which the senator is allowed to spend money to help other candidates.

"The wrong checkbook was accidentally used," Jaquez Lewis said.

Jaquez Lewis has been barred from having state-paid legislative aides as the result of the recent workplace complaint lodged against her and another one filed earlier last year. She has also been stripped of her committee assignments.

Finally, Jaquez Lewis **faces an ethics complaint** that could lead to a recommendation that she be expelled from the legislature. Several of Jaquez Lewis' colleagues have expressed dismay at her alleged mistreatment of aides given progressive legislation to boost workers' rights through legislation.

Jaquez Lewis was first elected to the legislature in 2018 as a state representative. She was elected to her first term in the Senate in 2020 and then reelected to a final, four-year term in November, winning the race in Senate District 17 by a roughly 2-to-1 margin.

NEWS: POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Ethics complaint filed against embattled state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis over alleged aide mistreatment

The complaint could lead to the most serious consequences yet for the Longmont Democrat who has already been stripped of her committee assignments and barred from having state-paid staffers at the Capitol



Jesse Paul

3:32 AM MST on Dec 18, 2024



State Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis during the swearing-in ceremony, Tuesday, Jan. 10, 2023, at the Colorado State Capitol in Denver. (Hugh Carey, The Colorado Sun)



A constituent of embattled state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis lodged an ethics complaint against the Longmont Democrat last week, alleging that Jaquez Lewis has failed to uphold her office with integrity and the public interest by mistreating her Capitol aides.

The complaint could lead to the most serious consequences yet for Jaquez Lewis, who has already been stripped of her committee assignments and barred from having state-paid

staffers at the Capitol in light of the aide allegations.

If leadership in the Senate agrees to advance the ethics complaint — as they’ve indicated they will do — it would initiate a committee investigation that could lead to a recommendation Jaquez Lewis be expelled from the chamber. It takes a two-thirds vote of the state Senate to remove one of its members.

The complaint was filed Dec. 7 by Kai Abelkis, a Longmont resident.

“Senator Sonya Jaquez Lewis has failed to uphold her office with integrity in the public interest,” Abelkis wrote. “(She has) lost my confidence in her role as a public figure.”

Abelkis described himself to The Colorado Sun as “just a concerned and engaged citizen.” He ran unsuccessfully as an unaffiliated candidate in 2014 for a seat on the Boulder County Commission. He’s donated to Democratic candidates and causes in the past.



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The complaint may need to be refiled after the legislative session starts in the new year to prompt an investigation once incoming Senate President James Coleman, a Denver Democrat, formally assumes his leadership role. Abelkis said he plans to do just that to ensure an investigation moves forward.

Coleman said on a podcast recently that he will honor any request for an ethics investigation into Jaquez Lewis. He said that “she too welcomes an investigation through (an) ethics hearing because she wants to be able to share all sides of the story.”

“We want to make sure that we have a formal investigation,” Coleman, who will become Senate president when the legislature reconvenes in January, **told the “Get More Smarter” podcast.**

Coleman downplayed the decision to bar Jaquez Lewis from having state-paid aides, as well as the decision to remove her from committees after repeated complaints from her subordinates.

“It’s not about punitive measures toward the senator,” Coleman said. “It’s about making sure that any potential staff moving forward are being protected while an investigation will be moving forward.”



Democratic state Sen. James Coleman speaks during an election watch party Tuesday, Nov. 8, 2022, in downtown Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

In a written statement to The Sun on Tuesday, Jaquez Lewis said she is “mortified about the allegations that have been made against me in the media recently.”

“I apologize if I have treated anyone with less than respect,” she said. “As a Latina and an LGBTQ person, I understand how it feels to be treated with disrespect.”

Jaquez Lewis said she has “proactively engaged a nonpartisan, non-political, HR trained management person that my staff can work with and go to for any issue.” She said she is working hard to improve her office environment and said she wants the best for her staff and others she works with.

“I believe in our Senate process and I will fully participate,” she said. “While I am focused on the important legislative work ahead, all the facts should come out and transparency is always the best for any public servant.”

Jaquez Lewis has this year been accused by two groups of legislative aides who said she mistreated them.

At the start of the year, she **was removed as chair** of the Senate Local Government and Housing Committee and blocked from serving as a lead sponsor of a wage theft bill following accusations that she refused to pay one of her aides. In April, Colorado Public Radio **reported** that four of Jaquez Lewis’ former staffers said “she withheld wages, set unreasonably demanding work schedules and attempted to prevent them from communicating with other people in the Democratic political sphere.”

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Last month, two of Jaquez Lewis’ most recent staffers **filed a workplace misconduct complaint** claiming she used one of them to do chores like yard work and bartend at a party at her home. That complaint, first reported by The Sun, led Senate leadership to remove her from committees and bar her from having state-paid staffers.

The complaint filed Nov. 15 with the legislature’s Office of Legislative Workplace Relations alleges that Jaquez Lewis paid the aide who did the landscaping work and tended bar over the summer with a check from her campaign’s bank account. She also allegedly used campaign money to pay the same aide for knocking on doors on behalf of an Adams County commissioner candidate who was running in the Democratic primary against the wife of one of Jaquez Lewis’ intraparty legislative rivals.

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Colorado candidates are prohibited from using campaign funds for “personal purposes not reasonably related to the election of the candidate.” They also are barred from using their campaign accounts to donate to other campaigns.



The Colorado Senate chambers at the state Capitol in Denver on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2024. (Jesse Paul, The Colorado Sun)

Jaquez Lewis amended her campaign finance filings after being contacted by The Sun. She said in her statement Tuesday that the July 6 event her aide bartended at was a campaign fundraiser, not a personal event.

“I have never ever used taxpayer money for personal events,” she said.

Jaquez Lewis’ campaign reported one donation on July 6 — a \$200 contribution from a Jamestown woman. But her leadership committee, Sonya for Dems, reported 11 donations on that day.

Jaquez Lewis was first elected to the legislature in 2018 as a state representative. She was elected to her first term in the Senate in 2020 and then reelected to a final, four-year term in November, winning the race in Senate District 17 by a roughly 2-to-1 margin.

Her district includes parts of Boulder, Weld and Broomfield counties.

The Political Workers Guild of Colorado, the union representing some state legislative aides, issued a public letter Dec. 7 calling for Jaquez Lewis to resign or be expelled from the Senate.

“Allowing Jaquez Lewis to stay in the Democratic caucus is a reflection of the caucus and their values,” the letter said. “The last two known violations by Jaquez Lewis have been met with consequences that she ignores or claims she never heard.”



Colorado state Sen. Sonya Jaquez Lewis gestures as she speaks before Colorado Gov. Jared Polis signed four gun control bills, Friday, April 28, 2023, in the State Capitol in Denver. (AP Photo/David Zalubowski)

The Senate Ethics Committee was last convened earlier this year to investigate a complaint against Democratic state Sen. Faith Winter of Broomfield, who appeared intoxicated at an April 3 community meeting in Northglenn. The complaint was filed against Winter in May by the Northglenn City Council for her behavior at the gathering about a state plan to open a

controversial mental health transitional living facility that could house people convicted of sex offenses.

The Senate Ethics Committee in July found that Winter had violated the Senate's ethics rules and invited Winter to address her behavior before the full Senate and **warned her** that future alleged ethics rules violations related to alcohol could lead to sanctions.

Winter sought treatment for substance abuse after the meeting in April. As a result of the incident, Winter stepped down as chair of the Senate Transportation and Energy Committee. She then didn't seek reelection as the chamber's assistant majority leader.

The 2025 legislative session begins Jan. 8.