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Santa Barbara Publisher Inaccurately Threatening Local Business Owners

Wendy McCaw Letters Aimed at Improperly Silencing Local Shopkeepers

LOS ANGELES - On behalf of a Santa Barbara shop owner and the ACLU's Santa Barbara chapter, the ACLU of Southern California notified *Santa Barbara News-Press* owner and publisher Wendy McCaw that threatening letters her attorneys have sent to local business owners are incorrect and must be stopped.

In a Dec. 13 "cease and desist" letter sent to Eric Zahm, owner of Highlights Hair Salon in Santa Barbara, an attorney for McCaw stated that the sign Zahm posted in his shop reading "McCaw Obey the Law" was defamatory and demanded that he remove the sign.

"It is outrageous that a lawyer would send out a threatening letter that shows such a misunderstanding of the law and it is even more outrageous that the owner of a newspaper who should be a champion of free speech is instead trying to silence the voices of members of the community," said Peter Eliasberg, the Manheim Family Attorney for First Amendment Rights for the ACLU/SC.

The ACLU/SC letter stated: "In light of the well-established law, I trust neither you or any other lawyer for Ms. McCaw or the *News-Press* will be sending threatening letters to Santa Barbara residents who choose to weigh in with opinions on the *News-Press's* labor dispute with its employees."

The threatening letters are the latest in series of events related to Santa Barbara's daily newspaper. The National Labor Relations Board is currently prosecuting two unfair labor practice charge against the *Santa Barbara News-Press* and investigating charges of other unfair labor practices. McCaw has also refused to negotiate with the staff union, which received a 33-6 vote in favor of unionization. And, earlier this month she sued the author of a critical American Journalism Review article about the paper's management, alleging it defamed the paper.

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