

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 4, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Steve Owens
Chairperson
U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board

Dear Mr. Owens:

According to a report of investigation issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Inspector General (OIG), during her time as the chairperson of the U.S. Chemical Safety Hazard Investigation Board (Board or CSB), Dr. Katherine Lemos violated the Federal Travel Regulation (FTR), improperly calculated travel expenses, exceeded the statutory cap on expenses to furnish and redecorate her office without notice to Congress, violated the Federal Management Regulation, and violated the Government Employees Training Act and Office of Personal Management (OPM) regulations.¹ Her improper conduct and excessive use of taxpayer money illustrates clear disrespect to the taxpayer.²

Regarding Lemos's travel between her residence and official duty station, the OIG found she was "not entitled to use government funds to pay for [her] travel between [her] residence in San Diego and [her] official duty station in Washington, D.C."³ The report notes that she cost the taxpayer \$49,668.46 in violation of the FTR.⁴ Additionally, when she switched her official duty station from Washington, D.C. to San Diego, she traveled to Washington, D.C. twice more for an additional, improper expense of \$5,163.54.⁵

With respect to other travel-related issues, the OIG found Lemos impermissibly used Board funds for non-official business.⁶ Her travel from Washington, D.C. to Norfolk, Virginia for her visiting a naval vessel amounted to \$1,246.53.⁷ The OIG found that the "embarkation on the

¹ Environmental Protection Agency Office of Inspector General, Report No. 23-N-0020 *Report of Investigation: Katherine A. Lemos, Former Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer, U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board*, (June 28, 2023), https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2023-06/epaoig_20230628-23-N-0020_redacted.pdf.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.* at 3.

⁴ The report notes, "Dr. Lemos traveled to Washington 18 times, at a total cost to the Board of \$49,668.46, in violation of the FTR." *Id.*

⁵ The report clarifies that, "Because federal law and regulations do not contain clear guidance related to changing the duty stations of federal agency heads, we were not able to conclude definitively that the expenses for the two trips were reimbursable under the FTR." *Id.*

⁶ *Id.* at 15.

⁷ *Id.* at 17.

aircraft carrier was not official CSB business and [her] use of Board funds for the travel to Norfolk was a violation of the FTR.”⁸

Regarding the furnishing and redecorating of Lemos’s office, the OIG found the “CSB incurred expenses of \$22,057.26 to furnish and redecorate [her] office”⁹ in Washington, D.C. The OIG found this violated the Federal Management Regulation. Further, this violated “the \$5,000 cap allowable under federal law without notification to Congress.”¹⁰ Additionally, documentation for one purchase appears to have been “designed to obscure the fact that the furniture...was intended for [her] office.”¹¹

With respect to Lemos’s use of taxpayer funds for her own training, the OIG found that she “used \$24,700 of Board funds to receive media training and executive coaching from two outside providers.”¹² This was done without prior approval from OPM and thus “violated the Government Employees Training Act...and OPM regulations.”¹³

In total, the OIG identified \$97,835.79 that she improperly cost the taxpayer.¹⁴ The OIG report describes conduct that is the very example of what a government employee should never do. Government employees exist to serve the people, not fleece them. Considering the OIG report’s findings, what steps have you taken to seek repayment from Dr. Lemos to make the taxpayer whole? If none, please explain why. In addition, what measures and steps have you taken to ensure that these abuses are never repeated? Please provide a response to these questions no later than August 18, 2023.

Sincerely,



Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member
Committee on the Budget

⁸ *Id.* Additionally, the OIG found that Lemos charged travel expenses to the Board for trips to Houston and Atlanta that originated from San Diego, for her own convenience, instead of Washington, D.C., as was proper. These trips cost \$1,582.98 and \$1,747.52 respectively. Under the FTR, she was entitled to reimbursement for airfare from Washington, D.C., but, “[i]f the fare from San Diego was higher, then [she] would be responsible for the excess cost.” *Id.* at 19-20.

⁹ *Id.* at 33.

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.* at 23.

¹² *Id.* at 36.

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ This amount reflects the impermissible expenses for travel from San Diego to Washington, D.C. (\$49,668.46 + \$5,163.54); her trip to Norfolk, Virginia (\$1,246.53); furniture and decoration in excess of the \$5,000 limit (\$22,057.26 - \$5,000); and personal training (\$24,700). This amount does not include any improper expenses from her Atlanta and Houston travels, which the OIG did not calculate.