

How Asshole San Francisco Politicians Steal Money From Taxpayers

San Francisco official spent \$80k of taxpayer cash on GLAMOR photoshoot as city crumbled

By [SAMANTHA RUTT](#)

A San Francisco city official is facing intense backlash after she awarded a \$100,000 contract to a production company for a glamorous photoshoot and video project.

Kimberly Ellis, the director of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women, has been called into question for her [unusual spending habits](#) after the city official spent \$80,000 of taxpayer money on 'employee portraits.'

The city official, who was placed on leave last week, reportedly awarded a contract worth up to \$100,000 to a high-priced production company in September 2023, hiring the firm to take portraits of 21 people and record a series of conversations on [gender](#) equity. In the end, Ellis' department paid \$80,000 towards the full amount of the contract, fueling mounting concerns about her frivolous spending habits.

Former staffers claimed Ellis' expenditure was an example of the official using resources in ways that seemed 'excessive or inappropriate' at a department tasked with ensuring that women are represented equally at City Hall.

'I don't think it's a good use of public money to engage a professional artist to take headshots of staff and the commissioners outside the de Young Museum,' one staffer, speaking on condition of anonymity, told the [San Francisco Chronicle](#).

'It could have been handled by someone in the department using their phone.'

Earlier this year, the under-fire official reportedly hired a life coach - from a company owned by a friend - to host a series of curiously expensive training sessions for her staff.



+5

[View gallery](#)

Kimberly Ellis (pictured in white), the director of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women, has been called into question for her unusual spending habits after the city official spent \$80,000 of taxpayer money on 'employee portraits'



+5

[View gallery](#)

The city official, who was placed on leave last week, reportedly awarded a contract worth up to \$100,000 to a high-priced production company in September 2023, hiring the firm to take portraits of 21 people and record a series of conversations on gender equity

The sessions wracked up a heaping \$85,000 sum over two fiscal years, according the Chronicle.

The training workshops included an all-expenses-paid work retreat near Lake Tahoe, where the staff 'drank heavily and spent the night at a resort-like hotel,' according to two former department employees.

Michael Canning, a spokesperson for the San Francisco Ethics Commission, said that although city officials are permitted to make governmental decisions that involve their friends, they are required to disclose those relationships - and it is unclear whether Ellis did so.

'Having a friend in city government should not give someone an advantage when accessing city services or doing business with the city,' Canning said.

'Requiring the disclosure of these kinds of relationships is intended to help discourage the granting of such unfair advantages.'

Often claiming to be 'the most powerful unelected person in California Democratic politics,' this is not the first time Ellis has faced such scrutiny.

The Golden State official has routinely mixed her role as a city official with her political life, often using city resources to support her friends and political allies.

Before embattled former **San Francisco Mayor London Breed** tapped Ellis for her current job, the wannabe politician ran twice for the chair at the California Democratic Party, and headed Emerge California, an organization that 'trains aspiring women leaders.'

In late 2022, Ellis reportedly directed \$128,000 in city money to a nonprofit, PowerPac.org, that paid her friend to produce short video interviews of four women leaders, including the .

That same nonprofit is affiliated with a political action committee, PowerPacPlus, that later hired Ellis as a consultant, paying her nearly \$20,000.



+5

[View gallery](#)

Former staffers claimed Ellis' expenditure was an example of the official using resources in ways that seemed 'excessive or inappropriate' at a department tasked with ensuring that women are represented equally at City Hall (pictured)



+5

[View gallery](#)

Now, Ellis alleges that she is the victim of retaliation. 'The allegations against me are baseless and appear to be part of an effort to silence and punish me for standing up for what is right,' she said in a statement last week

The official also spent increasingly large amounts on an annual women's summit, paying a nonprofit nearly \$675,000 to host the most recent conference, a cost of nearly \$1,000 per attendee.

San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie has since placed Ellis on leave, for reasons he has not disclosed.

She is now the subject of an ongoing investigation by the city attorney's office.

Now, Ellis alleges that she is the victim of retaliation.

She claims that she is being 'punished' for reporting misconduct involving a foster care program and a young woman who was harmed, but has not provided further details about her claims.

'The allegations against me are baseless and appear to be part of an effort to silence and punish me for standing up for what is right,' Ellis said in a statement last week.

The scathing investigation comes as the once tourist-riddled city continues to struggle with its increasing homeless population, rampant crime and faltering economy.

In 2024, the bayside city was ranked atop the list of America's worst-run cities, thanks to its looming \$1.4 billion budget deficit and myriad of other issues.

'Public safety, transportation, economic development, and environmental issues also continue to rank high,' Paul Helmke, an Indiana University professor who was involved in the 'worst-run city' research, said.

San Francisco has been battling a glut of negative headlines about the social ills plaguing a city that was until recently noted as a picturesque cultural hub on the Pacific coast.

The desolate reality of San Francisco's **hollowed out** city center was laid bare last year when footage showing every store in an entire retail block shuttered and empty was uncovered.

The prime real estate was once home to outlets including Uniqlo, H&M, Rasputin Records, and Lush, but all have disappeared.

The empty downtown area means less business paying property taxes, leading to a crippling \$790 million budget deficit, which experts warn is set to keep growing.

