

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
August 8, 2018

CONTACT:
Jake McNichol, 609-658-0648

Mountainside Candidates Condemn Council's Use of Settlements to Sweep Dangerous Behavior Under the Rug, Call for Independent Investigation

MOUNTAINSIDE, NJ—Candidates for Mountainside Borough Council Anjali Mehrotra and Ileana Montes today condemned the current Council for using settlement agreements to protect officers in the Mountainside Police Department from the consequences of a lawsuit alleging disgusting, dangerous behavior and double-dipping scams that went on for years. The candidates renewed their call for an independent investigation into the Administration to determine what the Mayor and Council knew about the officers' behavior, when they knew it, and why they took so long to act.

"These settlements are just another way the Council is protecting their friends in the police department from the consequences of their actions," said Anjali Mehrotra, "The responsible thing to do would have been to stop this behavior when the Council first learned about it instead of letting it continue and putting Mountainside in the situation we now face."

The candidates noted that Mayor Paul Mirabelli and the two Council members up for reelection this year—Councilman Robert Messler and Councilwoman Wendy Fech-Caccamo—were conveniently absent. Many at the meeting felt their absence, which allowed them to avoid voting on the settlement, reflected the absence of leadership that allowed this behavior to go unchecked for so long.

According to a lawsuit filed against the Borough of Mountainside in May, multiple officers in the Mountainside Police Department engaged in discriminatory, dangerous behavior dating back decades. These behaviors included making lewd comments about a female coworker, sending racist and pornographic emails from police department accounts, threatening other officers with a pocket knife, and pointing a loaded gun at other officers. Despite these behaviors, the officers involved were promoted over more qualified colleagues and were allegedly permitted to work side jobs and attend family events while being paid as if they were on patrol because of their special relationship to Borough leadership.

These behaviors and the decades-long cover-up cost Mountainside taxpayers dearly in unearned raises and overtime pay and now the lawsuit is adding to those costs with legal fees, rising insurance premiums, and potential settlements, all increasing the tax burden on Mountainside residents, or having to reduce services. Throughout this process, the Council has prioritized protecting the officers and their reputations to getting to the bottom of the issue and addressing the problems that allowed these behaviors to occur and continue unabated for years.

"It is time for the Administration to take responsibility for the role they played in creating and maintaining the culture that allowed these disgusting, discriminatory, and dangerous behaviors to take place for so long," said Ileana Montes, "We need a thorough, independent investigation that goes beyond just the police force to examine what role the Council played in all of this. Mountainside deserves leaders who stand up for our values and who put what is best for us ahead of what is best for their friends in the police department."

###