Fwd: County of Saginaw - Explanation of Meeting Resulting in Termination

Amy Belleman <[redacted]>
Fri 7/28/2023 6:29 PM
To:joyce_parker@msn.com <joyce_parker@msn.com>

1 attachments (548 KB)
Letters of Support.zip;

Begin forwarded message:

From: Amy Belleman <[redacted]>
Subject: County of Saginaw - Explanation of Meeting Resulting in Termination
Date: July 27, 2023 at 12:46:04 PM EDT
To: "Joyce A. Parker" <themunicipalgroup@msn.com>
Cc: Robert Belleman <[redacted]>

Joyce:

Thank you for the invitation to interview with the City of East Lansing. I am excited about the opportunity to interview and meet the Mayor, Council and staff. You asked that I provide you a written account of what transpired on June 20, 2023 the evening the Board of Commissioners voted to terminate my employment after ten (10) years of service to the County of Saginaw.

On June 12, 2023, while on a ten day vacation, I received a telephone call from Commissioner Sheldon Matthews ([redacted]) informing me Chairman Boyd was meeting with commissioners individually to obtain support for my termination. I returned from vacation on June 13th. I started calling my board members on June 14. Commissioner Krafft confirmed there was an effort to terminate my employment based on some complaints. He indicated he wanted an investigation to learn more about the complaints. I was able to reach four other commissioners who shared similar statements. None of the commissioners had specifics about the complaints. They indicated the complaints had to do with my "management style." I met with Chairman Boyd and Vice Chair Tany on Friday, June 16, 2023. Chairman Boyd explained he had received complaints about my management style and offered me the opportunity to resign, take my severance and the County would agree to provide a "neutral" recommendation. Chairman Boyd refused to provide any specifics about the alleged complaints. I declined the offer because (1) I had no knowledge of any complaints about my management style or of any other matter prior to my leaving for vacation on June 2nd; (2) I believed most of my Board members wanted to investigate the alleged complaints; and (3) I did not believe Chairman Boyd had authorization to solicit my resignation. I continued to reach out to my Board members throughout the weekend. The Board of Commissioners were scheduled to meet on June 20, 2023. The Chairman had placed an action item on the agenda for the Special Executive Committee, which met at 4:30 p.m on June 20, 2023, seeking authority to (1) hire

a special legal counsel to investigate the alledged complaints he had received, (2) to place me on paid suspension, and (3) to call a special meeting on June 26, 2023 to effectuate these requests.

The June 20, 2023 Regular Board meeting commenced with 26 individuals signed up under public comment to address the Board of Commissioners. Two individuals were there to speak on the County providing financial support to the Saginaw County Humane Society. One person did not show. This person with Sheriff Federspiel. I believe he did not show because he and I had resolved his concerns during a conversation the prior week. One person placed on the agenda, Public Works Commissioner Brian Wendling, did not request to speak and so did not appear before the Board. 10 individuals either raised concerns about my performance or solicited the Board of Commissioners to remove me from office. There was only one county employee (Josh Brown), who I directly supervised, that expressed a complaint about my handling of his performance issues. Josh is the IT Director overseeing several major IT projects including the transition from a legacy mainframe to five software systems. The Court Case Management system was one of the new systems and was not going well.

I had placed Josh Brown under a Performance Review Plan for deficiencies in four areas (Communication, Follow through, Financial Management, and Project Management). Josh and I had been meeting monthly for three years addressing these issues with little to no progress. I decided to formalize the deficiencies into to a formal Performance Improvement Plan. Josh complained I belittled him during these meeting and yelled. He apparently had audio recordings of our meetings which he shared with the Commissioners. Several Commissioners informed me the audio recordings did not support his claims. I did not belittle or yell at Josh. All of our meetings involved three union representatives, County Civil Counsel and County Personnel Director. None of these individuals were asked to provide any information regarding the context of my meeting with Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown spoke publicly and made statements I "bullied" him. Jason VanBocxlaer, Business Agent for the UAW Managers Unit, spoke indicating I wanted to fire Josh and the Performance Improvement Plan was my way of terminating him. I explained early on in the Performance Improvement Plan process that if Josh did not show improvement in addressing the deficiencies it could possibly result in his termination. Josh was struggling to take the advice the County and I was offering him. I agreed to send him to training. I agreed to engage a professional coach to assist him. I was attempting to help him succeed. He was not making progress so I had taken appropriate progressive discipline, which he and the union were grieving.

Josh Brown was my only employee that officially voiced a complaint to the Board of Commissioners at the June 20, 2023 Board meeting. County Clerk Guerra, Register of Deeds Kelly, and Prosecutor McColgan shared their experiences about working with me. Prosecutor McColgan's complaint was that my policies were making it difficult for his office to hire attorneys. Clerk Guerra indicated that I supported her on pursuing issues but then I would change my position later. She was specifically talking about a recent request she submitted to create a supervisor position in Circuit Court Records office. The Labor Relations Committee questioned where the money for the position was coming from. The Chief Deputy Clerk indicating there was money in the current budget that would cover the cost of a new supervisor position, which was partially accurate. A Commissioner inquired about where the money was coming from and whether what was

represented was accurate. I researched the matter and informed the Clerk her funding source was not going to be available in the subsequent year's budget because she and the Board had only committed funding for two years for temporary positions. The two year commitment was expiring at the end of the current fiscal year. I suggested she resubmit her request to the Labor Relations Committee and clarify the funding for the position. I still remained supportive of the request. The Clerk withdrew the request. Register of Deeds claimed I had threatened to "ruin her political career." The incident she is referring to took place three and half years prior when she was first elected as Register of Deeds. Ms. Kelly had expressed a desire to terminate an African American employee for poor performance. This employee had many successful years of service in the Register of Deeds office prior to Ms. Kelly being elected. Her predecessor had raised no performance issues with this employee. County Civil Counsel Dave Gilbert and I met with Ms. Kelly to better understand the basis for her desire to terminate this employee. Civil Counsel and I did not believe she had sufficient cause to terminate the employee. I explained to Register of Deeds Kelly that the employee could sue for wrongful termination and claim racial discrimination. I indicated if she did sue for racial discrimination it could have an adverse impact on her political career. I also explained that if I were to be subpoenaed I would testify that there was not enough documentation to support termination. To say the least, Ms. Kelly was not happy with Civil Counsel and me. She took my statements as threats.

Other individuals who spoke were disgruntled vendors who did not have their contracts renewed (BriAnn Summerset & Charles Campbell). Two other individuals who spoke against me were former Animal Control employees, who had been terminated for cause by the Director and/or County. Josh Brown's dad spoke in favor of terminating my employment.

There were 10 speakers who spoke on my behalf and shared their working relationship with me. One of these speakers was Mayor Brenda Moore, City of Saginaw. I encourage you or members of the Council to contact Mayor Moore for any additional insight into what transpired that evening.

The Board of Commissioners initially voted 7-4 to terminate my employment. The motion failed due to a lack of 2/3rds majority. The Chairman proceeded to have the Board approve his ability to hire special legal counsel to investigate the complaints made that evening. The Chairman also asked the Board to suspend me with pay while the County investigated the complaints. The Board approved both items. I was suspended immediately. By the time I arrived home, a MLive reporter texted me that the Board had reconvened the meeting and reconsidered its vote to terminate me for no cause. The motion passed 8-3.

I was never asked for my perspective on any of the complaints. There was no formal investigation. My employment file contains no formal complaints. I believe the Chairman and majority of the Board desired to move in another direction and the complaints was just an effort to ensure those Board members, who were uncertain where they stood, would support the effort to terminate. I had five new Board members who had been on the board for just six months.

I am attaching letters submitted to my Board by many community leaders and former

employees sharing their perspective on my management style or how I interacted with them.

The process Chairman Boyd used to achieve my termination was unfortunate and truly an attempt to discredit me. I have been told the effort was orchestrated by Josh Brown's dad who was very active in the union and Chairman Boyd.

I have moved on and I believe Mr Brown's characterization of events surrounding his Performance Improvement Plan and subsequent disciplines were mischaracterized. I have worked in the public sector for thirty years and have no complaints filed against me.

I hope this clarification is helpful in trying to understand the sensational, one-sided press coverage from the June 20, 2023 Board of Commissioners meeting.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Belleman