



THE STATE
of ALASKA
GOVERNOR MICHAEL J. DUNLEAVY

Office of the Governor

COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

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July 23, 2019

Chairperson Debbie Fullenwider
Alaska State Commissioner for Human Rights
800 A Street, Suite 204
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Chairperson Fullenwider,

On Wednesday, July 17 a meeting was held with Executive Director Marilyn Stewart at the request of Chairperson Fullenwider. The meeting was held at the Anchorage Commission offices. This was a non-public meeting. In attendance at the meeting was Chairperson Fullenwider, Vice Chairperson Sanders, Commissioner Barton, Executive Director Marilyn Stewart, Administrative Officer Toyia Del Valle and Commission Secretary Shari Ketchum. The Executive Director requested that Toyia and Shari leave the meeting so the remaining participants could speak confidentially.

While addressing issues, at some point in the discussion between Chairperson Fullenwider and Executive Director Stewart, the conversation became heated and confrontational. I was a little disappointed in the actions of Chairperson Fullenwider. I felt she showed little respect toward the Commission's new Executive Director. I felt some of the comments made did not represent the Commission and what the Commissioners and the Human Rights Commission stands for. I am not writing to destroy or tear down anyone. I would like to use this incident as a learning tool. Moving forward my desire is that we treat everyone including Commissioners and staff with mutual respect and honor. I realize that in the past there has been some tension in the office around recent events concerning former Executive Director Marti Buscaglia. The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights is getting past these highly unusual circumstances and moving toward the future. My hope is that in the future we are able to work out our differences and work together to build trust with one another and the citizens of Alaska that we serve.

Chairperson Fullenwider stated that she was not familiar with Marilyn's qualifications. She said the Commission had lost confidence in the Executive Director and questioned her qualifications. In making that statement, Chairperson Fullenwider was speaking for herself and not for the entire Commission. I personally do not agree with statements that were made. The entire Commission reviewed and vetted Marilyn's resume. As a body, the Commission came to a consensus that Marilyn was the most qualified and we wanted her to be our new Executive Director. The Commissioners placed our confidence in her ability to run the day to day operations of the Human Rights Commission representing the Commission. I

recommend that the Commission continue to support the new Executive Director to manage the day to day operations.

With regards to the issue of pay, Marilyn had some legitimate questions. She followed proper protocol and expressed those concerns. Marilyn is fully within her rights to be asking these questions. I fully support her right to ask those questions. Once Marilyn concerns were conveyed to the Chairperson, the next step is for the Commission to hold a public meeting and discuss this issue during executive session. We will be discussing the issues raised and the question of whether there is money available in the budget. A decision will be made by the entire Commission operating as one body.

Chairperson Fullenwider told Marilyn, "I am not going to get in a pissing match with you." I felt that statement was disrespectful and highly unprofessional. Statements like that should be left at home and not used at the office. That statement can be misconstrued in multiple ways. During the course of one of our investigations, if an employer made that statement investigations might conclude that the employee had been subject to a hostile work environment among other conclusions. This statement made by Chairperson Fullenwider made me personally uncomfortable and I found it offensive. I think she should apologize.

The issue has also been raised concerning the duties and authority of the Executive Director conveyed by the Commissioners. Any modification to the authority of the Executive Director would be duties that would revert back and need to be assumed by Commissioners. The seven Commissioners are volunteers with other full time commitments including paid employment. The Alaska State Commission for Human Rights was created by the Legislature in 1963. The suggested changes to the authority of the Executive Director and have not been done before in the long and honorable history of the Human Rights Commission.

Sincerely,



Marcus D. Sanders
Vice Chairperson

MDS/slk

cc: Commissioner David Barton
Commissioner William Craig
Commissioner Betsy Engle
Commissioner Cynthia Erickson
Commissioner Evelyn Falzerano
Assistant Attorney General Kevin Higgins
Executive Director Marilyn Stewart