



3900 Hollywood Boulevard, Suite 301
Hollywood, FL 33021

December 5, 2023*

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Alison Smith, Esq.
Brett J. Schneider, Esq.
Weiss Serota Helfman Cole & Bierman
200 E. Broward Blvd, #1900
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Re: Investigation re: Complaints against Commissioner Denise Grant

Dear Ms. Smith and Mr. Schneider:

On or about October 26, 2023, you retained my firm to conduct a neutral investigation on behalf of the City of Lauderhill (“the City”) regarding the complaints made against Commissioner Denise Grant by her former Aide, Stephanie Crooks. The City sought an independent investigation from outside its own organizational structure and retained attorneys already conducting work on behalf of the City. The Scope of Services called for objective investigative services and recommendations regarding the complaints made against Commissioner Grant. In this role, I was given complete freedom to investigate the matter by gathering and reviewing relevant records and interviewing relevant witnesses. The agreement also required preparing a report of my findings and potentially meeting with you or your clients regarding my recommendations. This document summarizes my investigation and serves as the report of my findings and recommendations.

Very Truly Yours,

Ria Chattergoon

Ria Chattergoon

* This report was amended to clarify that it was City Manager Desorae Giles-Smith who arranged the meeting between the Police Union and Commissioner Grant following the Unity in the Community event.



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Investigation of Complaints

I was contracted to conduct an impartial investigation of the complaints filed by Former Commission Aide, Stephanie Crooks, against Commissioner Denise Grant. The filed complaint involved allegations that Commissioner Grant harassed Ms. Crooks, subjected her to a hostile work environment, bullied her and retaliated against her. I was provided with copies of all complaints filed with the Human Resources Department, the City Clerk and the City Manager, as well as, other documentation that was provided to me by certain employees, including Commissioner Grant. During my investigation, I also identified and interviewed over 16 employees and individuals as witnesses. In preparation for all interviews, I reviewed the relevant Employee Handbook, Code of Ordinances, the City's Commission Meeting recordings, Personnel Administrative Policies & Procedures Manual, September 2022 Training Materials for Elected Officials, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ("EEOC") guidelines and relevant case law. During my investigation, I was provided a private setting to interview City employees without input or participation by any of the City's Human Resources staff or City Management. The purpose of this report is to relate the findings of my investigation and is the product of the above described process.

Stage 1: Review of Governing Documents

The City's Personnel Administrative Regulations:

The City's commitment to protecting individuals from discrimination and harassment can be found in the Administrative Policies & Procedures Manual. The City's Policies specifically prohibits both discrimination and harassment in the work place. *See* HR-4, Revision 3 (eff. 6/7/11). The City's policies specifically apply to: "All employees of the City, including but not limited to Department Heads, supervisors, non-supervisory personnel, and appointed and elected officials are required to abide by the stated intention of this policy."

Complaint Procedure

The City provides employees with a procedure for filing complaints. In pertinent part, the procedure provides:

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HR-4.5 PROCEDURE:

A. DEPARTMENT HEADS & MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITY

Management at all levels is responsible for preventing discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, in the workplace, for taking immediate corrective action to stop discrimination and harassment and for promptly investigating any allegation of work-related discrimination and harassment. Each Department Head has an affirmative duty to maintain his or her workplace free of discrimination, harassment and intimidation. In order to rebut any apparent liability, a Department Head must show he or she took immediate and appropriate corrective action, including, but not limited to the following:

1. Discuss this policy in detail with their employees and assure them that they can work in security and dignity, and are not required to endure insulting, degrading, or exploitive treatment.
2. Immediately report to the Human Resources Director or designee any complaints received from their employees concerning sexual harassment, and cooperate fully in his or her investigations of the allegations.

B. EMPLOYEES

An employee who believes that he or she has been subjected to discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, by anyone is encouraged to:



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1. Promptly tell the person that the conduct is unwelcome and ask the person to stop. A person receiving such request must

immediately comply with it and must not retaliate against the employee for rejecting the conduct.

Immediately report the incident to their direct supervisor or Department Head. If, for any reason, the employee feels uncomfortable in reporting such conduct to their supervisor or Department Head, the employee may report the action to the Human Resources Director or the City Manager.

All complaints shall be investigated immediately and the investigation shall be conducted impartially and as promptly as the circumstances allow. To the extent possible, under state law, the employee's confidentiality and that of any witness and the alleged harasser will be protected against unnecessary disclosure. After the investigation has been completed, a determination will be made by the appropriate management personnel regarding the resolution of the case. If warranted, disciplinary action, up to and including termination will be imposed. The City shall promptly take whatever action it deems appropriate to correct the discrimination or harassment pending the outcome of the investigation.

HR-4.6 RETALIATION:

This policy prohibits retaliation against employees who bring complaints of discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, or who assist in investigating such complaints. Any employee bringing a complaint of discrimination or harassment or assisting in the investigation will not be adversely affected in terms and conditions of employment. Nor shall any employee take any action against a complainant that is intended to discourage the complaint. Retaliation by any employee against



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the complainant could result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. Depending on the circumstances, it may also result in criminal prosecution.

See HR-4, Revision 3 (eff. 6/7/11).

STAGE 2: LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

EEOC GUIDELINES

The EEOC reference manual was reviewed and utilized for guidance as a result of some of the complaints from employees. The following sections are taken directly from the EEOC and relevant cases.[†]

Conducting A Thorough Investigation

Because discrimination (harassment and retaliation) often is subtle, and there rarely is a “smoking gun,” determining whether race played a role in the decision making requires examination of all of the surrounding facts and circumstances. The presence or absence of any one piece of evidence often will not be determinative. Sources of information can include witness statements, including consideration of their credibility; documents; direct observation; and statistical evidence such as EEO-1 data, among others.

FLORIDA STATUTE 112.3187 (FLORIDA’S PUBLIC WHISTLEBLOWER’S ACT)

Florida’s Public Whistleblower’s Act provides, in pertinent part:

(4) ACTIONS PROHIBITED.—

- (a) An agency or independent contractor shall not dismiss, discipline, or take any other adverse personnel action against an employee for disclosing information pursuant to the provisions of this section.

[†] See EEOC Compl. Man., Vol. I, Sec. 26.



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(b) An agency or independent contractor shall not take any adverse action that affects the rights or interests of a person in retaliation for the person's disclosure of information under

this section.

(5) NATURE OF INFORMATION DISCLOSED.—The information disclosed under this section must include:

(a) Any violation or suspected violation of any federal, state, or local law, rule, or regulation committed by an employee or agent of an agency or independent contractor which creates and presents a substantial and specific danger to the public's health, safety, or welfare.

(b) Any act or suspected act of gross mismanagement, malfeasance, misfeasance, gross waste of public funds, suspected or actual Medicaid fraud or abuse, or gross neglect of duty committed by an employee or agent of an agency or independent contractor.

(6) TO WHOM INFORMATION DISCLOSED.—The information disclosed under this section must be disclosed to any agency or federal government entity having the authority to investigate, police, manage, or otherwise remedy the violation or act, including, but not limited to, the Office of the Chief Inspector General, an agency inspector general or the employee designated as agency inspector general under s. 112.3189(1) or inspectors general under s. 20.055, the Florida Commission on Human Relations, and the whistle-blower's hotline created under s. 112.3189. However, for disclosures concerning a local governmental entity, including any regional, county, or municipal entity, special district, community college district, or school district or any political subdivision of any of the foregoing, the information must be disclosed to a chief executive officer as defined in s. 447.203(9) or other appropriate local official.

(7) EMPLOYEES AND PERSONS PROTECTED.—This section protects



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employees and persons who disclose information on their own initiative in a written and signed complaint; who are requested to participate in an investigation, hearing, or other inquiry conducted by any agency or

federal government entity; who refuse to participate in any adverse action prohibited by this section; or who initiate a complaint through the whistle-blower's hotline or the hotline of the Medicaid Fraud Control Unit of the Department of Legal Affairs; or employees who file any written complaint to their supervisory officials or employees who submit a complaint to the Chief Inspector General in the Executive Office of the Governor, to the employee designated as agency inspector general under s. 112.3189(1), or to the Florida Commission on Human Relations. The provisions of this section may not be used by a person while he or she is under the care, custody, or control of the state correctional system or, after release from the care, custody, or control of the state correctional system, with respect to circumstances that occurred during any period of incarceration. No remedy or other protection under ss. 112.3187-112.31895 applies to any person who has committed or intentionally participated in committing the violation or suspected violation for which protection under ss. 112.3187-112.31895 is being sought.

STAGE 3: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS PROCESS

The City, through Andrea Javier, Assistant Director of Human Resources, coordinated all interviews of all employees and elected officials. During my investigation, I identified additional witnesses to be interviewed to ensure a neutral investigation was conducted. Each witness was allowed the opportunity to reject the interview. I interviewed a total of 16 witnesses with only one witness opting to not to proceed with an interview. The majority of interviews were conducted in person with the remainder conducted via Zoom video conference or telephone.

Each interview began with an introduction of why I was hired by the City and the reason for the interview. A rubric of general questions was asked of each witness and then specific questions relative to each complainant or witness were asked. Witnesses were encouraged to speak freely and to answer in a narrative form to ensure the sharing of as much information as possible. Witnesses were given my contact information and encouraged to follow up with me if



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anything came to mind after our interviews. Several people followed up with me after their interviews and provided me with additional information and documents. The names of certain

non-management employees are not included in this report because each of those employees expressed concerns of retaliation. The following facts are deemed credible based on the convergence of facts from a broad range of witnesses, interviewed independently from one another. The voluminous facts and evidence have been condensed for this report.

FACTUAL FINDINGS

Stephanie Crooks, former Aide to Commissioner Grant filed a formal complaint against Commissioner Grant that included allegations of a hostile work environment, including but not limited to, a bombardment of calls and text messages before and after working hours, yelling, requests for declarations of “loyalty,” and retaliation. Ms. Crooks alleged that she was subjected to verbal abuse during the last three months of her working with Commissioner Grant, with it becoming increasingly worse during the week of October 1-5, 2023. Commissioner Grant denied the accusations made against her and stated that she was surprised by Ms. Crooks’ complaints.

During my meeting with Stephanie Crooks, she detailed her relationship and working environment with Commissioner Grant. She expressed that upon being hired, she was very grateful to work for Commissioner Grant as she knew her, lived in the same condominium building as Commissioner Grant, and previously supported her campaigns. She stated that from the beginning of her employment, she would work after hours and go above and beyond the call of duty because she was grateful to Commissioner Grant for giving her the opportunity. She expressed that Commissioner Grant frequently complimented her and did not have any issues with her performance prior to April 2023. Ms. Crooks claims that her issues with Commissioner Grant began around April 2023 after she was contacted by an investigator for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (“FDLE”) (identified by another witness), for a separate and ongoing investigation involving Commissioner Grant.

Ms. Crooks stated that a week after she was interviewed by the FDLE investigator, Commissioner Grant called her to meet her in the shared lobby of their building. Ms. Crooks stated that Commissioner Grant asked her whether the FDLE investigator had interviewed her.



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Ms. Crooks admitted that she lied and told Commissioner Grant that she had not been interviewed because she was told by the FDLE investigator not to discuss the meeting. A week later, Ms. Crooks testified that Commissioner Grant's attitude towards her changed. She stated that Commissioner Grant became short with her, she screamed at her, stopped including

her on emails, and began keeping her out of the loop. She claimed that Commissioner Grant would delete events from her calendar and then blame her for not accurately maintaining her calendar. Commissioner Grant, however, stated that during this same time period Ms. Crooks was not scheduling her events properly and was not responding to constituents who contacted the office. She also denied screaming or yelling at Ms. Crooks.

Around July or August 2023, Ms. Crooks stated that she visited Commissioner Grant's mother's home to pick up a gift from a friend. While at Commissioner Grant's home, Ms. Crooks stated that Commissioner Grant interrogated her and asked her if she was wearing a wire. Ms. Crooks stated that she went into the garage of the home with Commissioner Grant and unbuttoned her shirt to prove to Commissioner Grant that she was not wearing a wire. Ms. Crooks stated that Commissioner Grant also told her that she was not to have any more contact with her family members or friends moving forward. Commissioner Grant, however, stated that it was Ms. Crooks who came to her mother's house around June 2023 and informed her that she had been questioned by an investigator. She claimed that Ms. Crooks informed her that "they" were trying to make her (Ms. Crooks) turn against her and that Ms. Crooks was upset and crying. Commissioner Grant stated that she was unaware who the FDLE investigator spoke with but admitted that she could figure out who he spoke with based on some of the questions that he had asked her.

On or about October 1, 2023, Ms. Crooks stated that she attended the Pink Up Lauderhill event in order to manage Commissioner Grant's tent. Ms. Crooks stated that before she arrived to the event, Janet Young, a vendor who is friends with Commissioner Grant and who was providing juices for Commissioner Grant's tent that day, called her to admonish her for not being at the event at 7 a.m. Ms. Young confirmed that she did call Ms. Crooks but denied that she yelled or screamed at her. Ms. Young stated that she was upset that Ms. Crooks was not at the event to set up Commissioner Grant's tent because all of the other Commissioners' tent was set up. Ms. Crooks, however, indicated that she was not scheduled to arrive at the event until 8 a.m. and that she explained that to Ms. Young. She further stated that when she arrived at the event, she and all City employees were given a pink t-shirt to wear. Ms. Crooks admitted that she noticed that another Commissioner's name was on the t-shirt,

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however, all City employees were wearing the t-shirt for the event, including other Commissioners' Aides. Ms. Crooks stated that she did not think she did anything wrong with wearing the t-shirt. To that end, Ms. Crooks sent Commissioner Grant pictures of the event,

including one with her wearing the shirt. Commissioner Grant confirmed that the pictures were sent to her and provided me with a copy of the picture. Following the event, Ms. Crooks stated that she received a call from Commissioner Grant, who did not attend the event, but who screamed at her for wearing the pink t-shirt. Ms. Crooks, who was in a car with three other people, stated that Commissioner Grant called her disloyal and asked her who she was really working for. Commissioner Grant admitted that the call took place but insisted that she did not yell at Ms. Crooks. She stated that she may have been passionate in her discussion with Ms. Crooks.

That same day, following the Pink Up event, Commissioner Grant emailed City Clerk, Andrea Anderson, requesting that Ms. Crooks be provided with additional training because of Ms. Crooks management of her tent and because of her "disposition" towards residents during the Pink Up event. Commissioner Grant also expressed that she was concerned about Ms. Crooks' professionalism. Andrea Anderson confirmed Commissioner Grant's request and provided me with a copy of the email Commissioner Grant sent to her. The following day, on October 2, 2023, Commissioner Grant emailed Ms. Anderson and expressed that she believed that Ms. Crooks was confused as to who she reported to and requested a meeting. On October 4, 2023, a meeting was scheduled with Ms. Anderson, City Manager Desorae Giles-Smith, Human Resources Director CiCi Krempler, pursuant to Commissioner Grant's request. At the beginning of the meeting, Ms. Crooks stated that Commissioner Grant surprisingly asked her what the meeting was for and claimed that it was Ms. Crooks who wanted to meet. During the meeting, Ms. Crooks confirmed that she was not confused about reporting to the City Clerk as a direct report but serving Commissioner Grant in her day to day duties. Commissioner Grant confirmed that this interaction occurred at the meeting and that she was surprised at Ms. Crooks' response to her because she claimed Ms. Crooks asked for the meeting. Ms. Crooks was dismissed from the meeting and Commissioner Grant met with Ms. Giles-Smith about the training she believed Ms. Crooks needed. Ms. Giles-Smith confirmed Commissioner Grant's request for training in writing and provided me with that email. A review of the email shows that Commissioner Grant requested an Aide that speaks Creole; asked for Ms. Crooks to be trained on PowerPoint and multi-tasking; following a daily schedule; accurately booking her calendar; working faster; advising her when she was unavailable to answer her phone; and

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completing her social media set up. Notably, my investigation revealed that prior to Commissioner Grant's October request for training for Ms. Crooks, she had favorably evaluated Ms. Crooks and had never made a complaint about her performance to either the City Clerk or City Manager.

Following the October 4, 2023 meeting, Ms. Crooks stated that Commissioner Grant pulled her into her office for 2.5 hours and berated her. Commissioner Grant, however, stated that the meeting was only about 7 minutes long and that it was Ms. Crooks who initiated the meeting. Ms. Khya Cummings, Aide to the Mayor, who was in the same office space, however; confirmed that Ms. Crooks was in Commissioner Grant's office for over two hours. Ms. Crooks further stated that following the meeting, she took her lunch break and Commissioner Grant seemingly followed her to the lunch room where she went on the balcony and was pacing. Commissioner Grant denies following Ms. Crooks and stated that she was on the balcony because of her cell phone reception. She claimed that she was on the phone with the City Attorney talking to her about obtaining more training for Ms. Crooks. The City Attorney, Angel Petti Rosenberg, confirmed that Commissioner Grant called her that day about training for Ms. Crooks. Ms. Rosenberg also confirmed that the City Attorney's office is not involved with operational decisions for the City and that she had expressed that both to Commissioner Grant and the City Manager. Ms. Rosenberg provided me with the email she sent to Commissioner Grant, the City Manager and the Human Resources Director confirming this statement.

After her lunch break, Ms. Crooks claimed that Commissioner Grant came into her workspace and sat behind her and stared at her. Khya Cummings, Aide to the Mayor, whose workspace was next to Ms. Crooks, stated that she witnessed Commissioner Grant's behavior towards Ms. Crooks. Ms. Cummings confirmed that Commissioner Grant did sit behind Ms. Crooks staring at her and that she was seemingly recording Ms. Crooks. Commissioner Grant denies that she was staring at Ms. Crooks and stated that she was at Ms. Crooks' work station working on an RSVP list for an event later that evening. Ms. Crooks and Ms. Cummings both stated that Commissioner Grant asked one question about the rsvp list for the event that evening and simply sat behind Ms. Crooks staring at her. Both Ms. Crooks and Ms. Cummings stated that Commissioner Grant only left after she received a call. They further stated that about one hour after she left, Commissioner Grant called Ms. Crooks and could be heard screaming through the phone asking Ms. Crooks if she was recording her call. Commissioner Grant denies that she was screaming and claimed that she found out after the fact that Ms. Crooks put her on speaker phone. Ms. Crooks denies putting Commissioner Grant on speaker

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phone and Ms. Cummings confirmed that Ms. Crooks did not put the phone on speaker. Subsequently, Commissioner Grant emailed Ms. Anderson and suggested that that two part-time Aides, as opposed to one full time Aide, would better suit her needs. Ms. Anderson

disagreed and informed Commissioner Grant that Ms. Crooks was able to work all of the hours she needed.

Ms. Crooks stated that following the interactions of October 4, 2023 she decided to file a formal complaint against Commissioner Grant and requested a transfer. Ms. Cummings informed me that she also filed a complaint with the City Clerk's office because she was uncomfortable with Commissioner Grant's actions that day. Notably, Ms. Cummings informed me that she witnessed Ms. Crooks being very anxious to leave her phone to go to the bathroom most days in the event Commissioner Grant called her. Ms. Cummings also noted that Ms. Crooks was in a constant state of anxiety because she did not know what mood Commissioner Grant would be in on any given day and that Ms. Crooks consistently stated to her "our bosses are very different."

Ms. Crooks confirmed that she previously spoke with City Clerk, Andrea Anderson and Assistant City Clerk, Nadia Chin about Commissioner Grant's behavior beginning in May 2023. Ms. Anderson confirmed that Ms. Crooks spoke to her several times and indicated that she had suggested a transfer during the summer of 2023, however, Ms. Crooks was determined to attempt to do the job and make it work. Ms. Anderson stated that Ms. Crooks was dedicated to her job and Commissioner Grant and that prior to October 2023, she had not received any complaints about Ms. Crooks' performance from Commissioner Grant. Ms. Anderson stated that it was clear that Commissioner Grant's alleged performance issues became an issue after Commissioner Grant was either informed or suspected that Ms. Crooks had been interviewed by FDLE. Ms. Anderson further stated that she herself had faced retaliation by Commissioner Grant for disagreeing with her about Ms. Crooks' performance. She stated that Commissioner Grant refused to evaluate her this year, although she had done so in previous years and gave her glowing reviews. Commissioner Grant stated that she chose not to evaluate Ms. Anderson and City Manager Giles-Smith because she had issues with some of their performance but did not want to place anything negative in writing.



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Eight of the employees ranging from management to non-management employees interviewed revealed that Commissioner Grant would repeatedly and consistently call and text employees after hours and on the weekends. Witnesses described Commissioner Grant as “relentless” if they did not answer their phones and stated that she would call back to back

until she received an answer. Some witnesses stated that they found this behavior to be abusive and admitted that they blocked Commissioner Grant from their phones. When asked about this issue, Commissioner Grant stated she did not believe that her calls were excessive and that it was “a matter of perspective.”

According to all of the employees, both management and non-management employees, Commissioner Grant can be very difficult to work with and that she approaches every matter with a pre-conceived notion that she was being undermined or ignored. Each employee provided detailed examples of instances wherein Commissioner Grant behaved in an unprofessional manner. For example, Leslie Johnson, Director of Public Relations and Cultural Arts, who works with all Commissioners on marketing for their events, stated that Commissioner Grant would excessively call and text her after hours; accused her of not performing her duties properly; would yell and scream at her in private but then compliment her in front of other people; and, continuously accuse Ms. Johnson of giving other Commissioners preferences on hastags and marketing. Ms. Johnson stated that many of the issues that Commissioner Grant complained of to her were simply untrue and quantifiable by a review of the marketing materials. Ms. Johnson further stated that Commissioner Grant would schedule and reschedule meetings but not show up to the meetings with her and her staff. Ms. Johnson also claimed that Commissioner Grant had a habit of blaming her Aides (including Ms. Crooks as and former Aide) when marketing was not promptly completed. She stated, however, that Commissioner Grant did not provide clear direction to her Aides and that she would simply not respond to certain inquiries. Ms. Johnson further stated that the past five years have been difficult for her because Commissioner Grant consistently told her that “people are watching her” and that 90% of Jamaicans in South Florida “knew about her.” Ms. Johnson, who lives and works in the City of Lauderhill, stated that she found this to be very threatening and demeaning. Commissioner Grant, on the other hand, claimed that Ms. Johnson was biased and that she believed that Ms. Johnson did not like her because Ms. Johnson wanted to be the Deputy City Manager and was upset when she was not given the position. Ms. Johnson denies this claim and stated that it was simply untrue.



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Another example came from the City's Police Department during a Unity in the Community event. During that event, Commissioner Grant's flyer was inadvertently left out of a

bag to be given to residents. Commissioner Grant stated that she asked Chief Constance Stanley why her materials were missing and that Chief Stanley stated that she would look into it. Other witnesses however, including Chief Stanley, indicated that Commissioner Grant became irate, dumped a bag of materials onto a resident's porch and began to yell at everyone around her. Witnesses stated that Commissioner Grant was yelling at Chief Stanley in the middle of the street, in front of residents, until Chief Stanley calmed her down indicating that the press was present. The incident was witnessed by a member of the police union who took issue with how Commissioner Grant approached and spoke to Chief Stanley. The members of the union decided to write a formal letter reprimanding Commissioner Grant's conduct. Chief Stanley informed City Manager Desorae Giles-Smith about the letter. City Manager Giles-Smith, in an attempt to diffuse the situation and to avoid embarrassing Commissioner Grant asked that a meeting be scheduled instead. A meeting was subsequently held and I was informed that the meeting was productive. I obtained a copy of the letter written about the event during my investigation to verify the statements made by two police officers.

During my investigation, I discovered that all Commissioners received training on harassment in the workplace and were informed how they were supposed to work with staff. I also discovered that both the City Manager and the City Clerk had a few conversations with Commissioner Grant about how to interact with staff members, specifically after hours. Commissioner Grant denied being abrupt or unprofessional with staff members and instead explained that she is direct. She stated that sometimes her approach may be perceived differently by others.

In addition to the conduct and actions described above, it was obvious that many of the employees who work for the City find it difficult to work with Commissioner Grant. Eighty percent of the witnesses interviewed were concerned about having their names included in my findings of fact and specifically stated that they were concerned about being retaliated against. At least three witnesses stated that if Commissioner Grant was successful in her bid to become Mayor in the next election that they would resign their positions. During my investigation, I also interviewed a list of witnesses provided by Commissioner Grant. Most of these witnesses

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provided public statements at the City's public meeting and served as character witnesses for Commissioner Grant. These witnesses did not work with Commissioner Grant or the City, however, notably at least two of the witnesses listed worked as vendors for the City. Some of these witnesses are mutual friends of both Commissioner Grant and Ms. Crooks and stated that they were shocked at Ms. Crooks' allegations. Specifically, the witnesses claimed that Ms. Crooks praised Commissioner Grant and never indicated that there was any issue occurring in

the workplace. When asked about these perceptions, Ms. Crooks stated that she was always professional and that she never wanted to involve individuals outside of the workplace. Ms. Crooks further stated that she was not aware that her complaint would be brought before the Commission and the public. She claimed that as a result of her complaint being made public that she has received threats and that her home address has been made public.

CONCLUSION

Following my investigation, including interviews and a review of the complaints and additional material provided to me, I do not believe that harassment or hostile work environment exist as defined by federal or Florida law. While Commissioner Grant's behavior towards Ms. Crooks, as witnessed by third parties, may have been unprofessional and inappropriate at some times, I do not find that they rose to the level of a hostile work environment pursuant to relevant case law. My findings, however, indicate a potential risk to the City for a claim of retaliation under the Florida Whistleblower Act. My investigation revealed a clear timeline and/or chain of retaliatory events beginning around the FDLE investigation that commenced in April/May 2023 and after Ms. Crooks participated in the FDLE investigation. The facts, as described above and confirmed with a multitude of witnesses, including Commissioner Grant, establish that Commissioner Grant's alleged performance issues with Ms. Crooks began after the FDLE investigation and after Commissioner suspected who the potential witnesses to that investigation were. Commissioner Grant's conduct towards Ms. Crooks following her confirmation that Ms. Crooks had been interviewed by the FDLE became increasingly worse. As discussed above, Commissioner Grant began to remove Ms. Crooks from pertinent emails and conversations which prevented from properly performing her job duties and began speaking to her in a hostile manner. Furthermore, her request for training for Ms. Crooks, almost eight months after Ms. Crooks had already been working for her was questionable. Specifically, both the City Manager and the City Clerk admitted that they were surprised at Commissioner Grant's request because Commissioner Grant had not previously indicated that she had concerns with Ms. Crooks' performance. Furthermore, Commissioner



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Grant's request for two Aides, which would essentially either terminate Ms. Crooks or reduce her hours was also questionable and was concerning to the City Clerk. In my opinion, the City Manager and City Clerk's decision to transfer Ms. Crooks to another department and away from serving Commissioner Grant was the right decision and reduced the City's risk.

It should be noted that during my investigation, it became apparent that Commissioner Grant's perceived retaliation may also extend to the City Clerk, Andrea Anderson. As mentioned above, Ms. Anderson, who has been employed with the City for over 29 years, expressed that she is also fearful of retaliation from Commissioner Grant because she was also interviewed by the FDLE. She specifically stated that she feared being terminated after 29 years of service should Commissioner Grant ever obtain a majority of votes of the Commission. Ms. Anderson's reasoning for this was that Commissioner Grant refused to evaluate her this year, as also discussed above, despite giving her good evaluations in the past 3 years. Ms. Anderson informed me that the weight of the evaluation could have affected her raise, however, it did not as her scores from the other four Commissioners provided her with a good average. Ms. Anderson provided me with her previous years' evaluations and metric scoring.

It is my recommendation that Commissioner Grant, an elected official, must be counseled on appropriate work place behavior for working with the City's staff. Furthermore, I recommend that all elected officials for the City receive training on retaliation in the workplace. Because elected officials are not City employees they are not required to attend regular employee trainings, however, as individuals who work with the City's employees, it is imperative that all elected officials adhere to the City's policies and procedures. Commissioner Grant expressed her desire to continue serving her community, however, the City's employees are paramount to her service. The overwhelming responses from all employees interviewed indicate that they do not feel respected or valued when working with or for Commissioner Grant. I further recommend that each City employee receives some training on harassment and reporting of harassment, if one has not already been completed this year. Additionally, each employee of the City should be reminded of their ability to access the City's Employee Assistance Program and encouraged to utilize it when needed.

Sincerely,
Ria Chattergoon
Ria N. Chattergoon

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