

**CHIPPEWA COUNTY  
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
PERSONNEL, EQUALIZATION AND APPORTIONMENT/TRANSPORTATION/HEALTH  
AND SOCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
*Scott Shackleton Acting, Chairman*

December 10, 2020

The Chippewa County Board of Commissioners Personnel, Equalization and Apportionment/Transportation/Health and Social Services Committee met on Thursday, December 10, 2020, at 3:30 p.m. in the 50<sup>th</sup> Circuit Courtroom.

Acting Chair Scott Shackleton called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. with a quorum present. The meeting was also available via Zoom.

PRESENT: Commissioners Robert Savoie, and Scott Shackleton

ABSENT: Chairman Conor Egan

ALSO, PRESENT: Cathy Maleport, Clerk. *Present via Zoom: Ashley Ball, Michelle Robbins, Tammy Peyton, Alonzo Upchurch, James Robinson, Ms. France's Attorney Sara Howard, Kaye Batho, Erin Dornbos, Sean Fosmire from Marquette, Jennifer France, Shane Hill, Suzanne Lieurance, Leanne Yiirs, Brian Bartlett, Jessica Tobias, Jillian Sadler, Missy P., and Amber Ward*

ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS TO THE AGENDA

It was moved by Commissioner Savoie, seconded by Commissioner Shackleton, to approve the agenda as presented. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Alonzo Upchurch, Jessica Tobias, and Assistant Public Defender Ashley Ball all spoke about their concerns with Ms. France's termination. In addition, Ms. Ball voiced her concerns with the volume of cases, Ms. France currently has and her concern regarding the rights of her clients, as well as, a needed plan for the Public Defender's office.

Ms. France's attorney, Sara Howard, indicated that she has grave concerns with this termination. Her belief is that it was unlawful and she is continuing to investigate it and believes that the termination was based on retaliation and discrimination. She indicated she submitted a letter to the Committee for their review. Ms. Howard further noted that she would rely additionally on the letter submitted to the Committee and offered to answer any questions.

Commissioner Shackleton noted that under Public Comments, we regard it at the County as an opportunity for the Public to speak, not for us to debate you or challenge you, but rather your chance to speak and be heard.

Hearing no further public comments, Commissioner Shackleton closed the public comments portion of the meeting.

## AGENDA ITEMS

1. Personnel
2. Employee Appeal

Commissioner Shackleton communicated that this has already been well defined; It's a personnel issue; the Board of County Commissioners chose to terminate the employment of Chief Public Defender Jennifer France as of December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. Mr. Shackleton noted that our rules here at the County allow for an employee appeal of that action, and if the employee chooses, they can request that it be done in a closed session. Commissioner Shackleton then asked Mrs. France if she requested that the appeal be heard in a closed session?

Ms. Howard replied, "Gentleman, I will speak on behalf of Ms. France as her attorney; we are not requesting a closed session."

Commissioner Shackleton noted that this is not something that has taken place many times in the County. He believes that this is the first time. We are attempting to give the employee a fair opportunity, in this case, Mrs. France, to present an appeal, and we are here to listen. Mr. Shackleton asked, under the agenda item, do either Mrs. France or her representation, Ms. Howard have further comments that you would like to make?

Ms. Howard replied, "I would only say this, we have outlined as requested the reasons, evidence that we believe exists thus far, to demonstrate that this is an unlawfully motivated termination. We've been given no reason for the decision, so we cannot refute or respond to any allegations of concern or any other issue. That being the case, there is nothing further to say. Still, I am happy to answer any questions about the information we submitted in writing, or anything I said today in the public comment or during this session that you have."

Commissioner Shackleton called upon Commissioner Savoie and asked if he had any comments to add or make. Commissioner Savoie's response was, "I do not at this time."

Commissioner Shackleton noted that he runs a small business and discharging or terminating employment is by far the hardest part of the job. It is not fun for either party. Mr. Shackleton also noted that people have a right to legal defense under our Constitution regardless of their ability to afford legal protection. Chippewa County has spent millions and millions of dollars to provide legal defense to the indigent; it's not only their legal, constitutional right, it is also the right thing to do and we will continue to do that here. No one should question the commitment of this County to continue to provide legal defense to the indigent.

It was moved by Commissioner Savoie, seconded by Commissioner Shackleton, to uphold the Board's decision and deny the appeal. Commissioner Shackleton noted that the Committee would have had to heard something that was extraordinarily compelling to change the decision of the full Board. On a voice vote, the motion carried.

## COMMITTEE COMMENTS

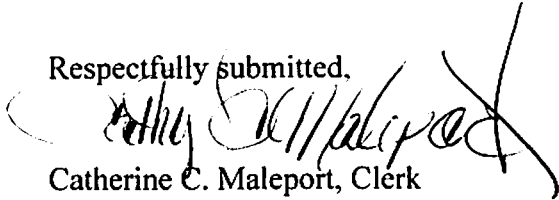
No comments were offered.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

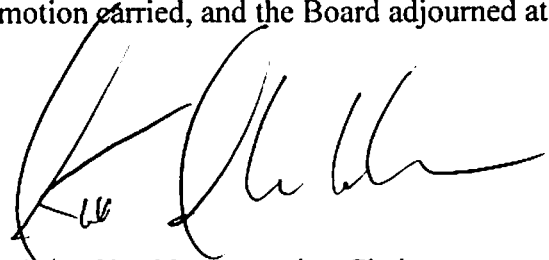
No comments were offered.

Having completed the agenda items, it was moved by Commissioner Savoie, seconded by Commissioner Shackleton to adjourn. On a voice vote, the motion carried, and the Board adjourned at approximately 3:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Catherine C. Maleport, Clerk



Scott Shackleton, Acting Chairman