

To: Heather Johnston, City Operations Officer
Fatima Moore, Deputy City Operations Officer
Jacob Frey, Mayor
Nikki Odom, Chief Human Resources Officer

From: Tyeastia Green, Director of Racial Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (REIB)

Re: Toxic Work Environment and Antiracism

Date: March 6, 2023

Introduction:

As the director of the REIB for the enterprise, I felt it appropriate to lay out the toxic work environment that I have experienced and to request an investigation. In this report, I cite experts and scholars to show how what I have experienced here is, in fact, antiracism and that some of that racism was done at the hands of other Black people in the enterprise. I am also informing the enterprise of my intention to file a lawsuit against CM Latrisha Vetaw and any of her accomplices on and off the council for defamation of character. “Defamation is the use of false and malicious statements to malign or damage a person’s reputation. In the workplace, it has the potential to bring an employee’s character into disrepute, stifle career development, and create serious health issues. In some cases, defamation causes irreparable damage.”¹

Background:

“If you are silent about your pain, they'll kill you and say you enjoyed it.” — Zora Neale Hurston

The people who enter racial equity/racial justice work know that they have all the odds against them. We know it. We feel it, and we armor up against it. We are prepared and ready for the fight – intellectually, mentally, and most importantly, emotionally. Coming into the enterprise, I had high hopes. Those hopes were based on where I believed Minneapolis was going and how I could be a part of that. Minneapolis has a well-represented city council, liberal leadership, and from the outside looking in, all of the items in place to move our city from racist to antiracist. The horrific murder of George Floyd gave Minneapolis a unique platform – one that could influence the entire nation depending on how the city responded. We all sat and waiting, near and far, wondering how Minneapolis would handle the global watchful eye. Will Minneapolis do the right thing? I decided to join Minneapolis in this fight against antiracism that has plagued the city and the country for too long. I believed what better place to do this work than my hometown.

However, being in the belly of the beast for nearly a year, I know that not only is Minneapolis far behind the curve of other cities and towns in fighting against racism, Minneapolis, as an enterprise, doesn’t even make it on the list to be considered doing the work of antiracism. Minneapolis holds, matures, coddles, perpetuates, and massages a racist anti-black work culture. This culture inevitably affects our employees – mainly those of color and our residents.

¹ Raees Mohamad, “Defamation in the Workplace: How Do You Protect Your Reputation?”, August 5, 2022, Warner Law.

“Anti-Blackness is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, actions, practices, and behaviors of individuals and institutions that devalue, minimize, and marginalize the full participation of Black people —visibly (or perceived to be) of African descent. It is the systematic denial of Black humanity and dignity, which makes Black people effectively ineligible for full citizenship.²”

On my first day, March 28th, 2022, I was placed in a windowless, mouse-infested space that shared a wall with inmates. I could hear crying, talking, praying, etc., at various times throughout the day. The mere placement of the then Race & Equity office was very telling as an incoming director, where race relations ranked in the enterprise and its importance. There was no intention to move Race & Equity during the “Stacking” process. I watched other departments that didn’t need a new space, be placed in better, upgraded spaces. While the space I was in wasn’t inviting to the new employees I was hiring, and it seemed inhumane to require my new hires to work in a space without sunlight. I had to beg to be moved to a more suitable place literally. I begged the City Coordinator, I begged several council members, and after six months was moved to a more appropriate location, but still not like the offices of other departments.

Instances of Racism and Antiracism:

In her book, *Weapons of Whiteness – Exposing the Master’s Tools Behind the Mask of Anti-Blackness*, Catrice M Jackson says, “Weapons of Whiteness are conscious and unconscious behaviors, actions, and words used to lethally deny your existence, stifle your spirit, silence your voice, kill your joy, put you in harm’s way, and paralyzes your progress.” In this section, I intend to show how weapons of whiteness were used against my leadership, initiatives, and department.

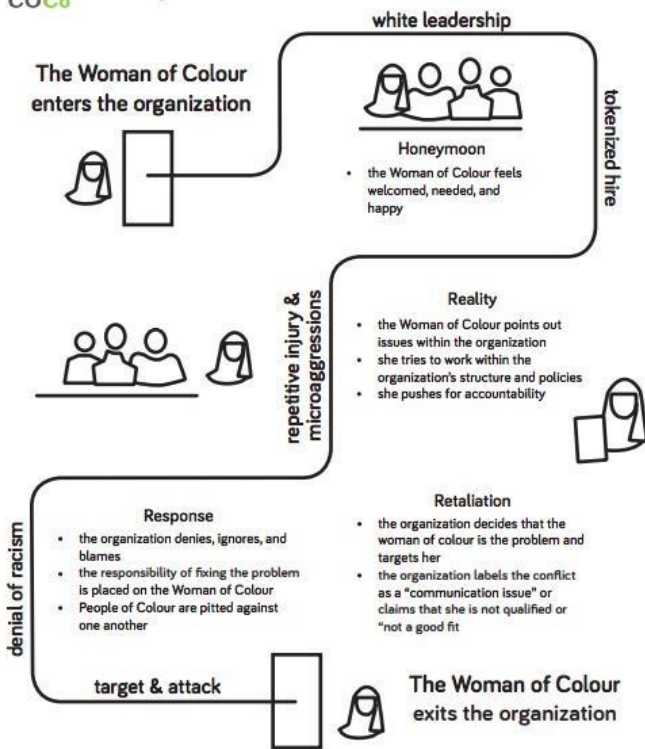
Since April 2022, I’ve been treated as a department head when it’s convenient for the city to do so – when the optics are in the city’s favor. I officially became a department head with the passing of the government structure. But in practice, I’m still treated as a division leader who needs the COO’s sign-off for everything I do in my department. I’d like to see any documentation if the directors of Public Works, CPED, HR, NCR, IT, or any other department have to do the same. I’ve asked around – they don’t. I have limited this list, for the purposes of keeping this document short, but I do have an extensive list of racism, microaggressions, and antiracism acts doled out from leadership to several Black people in the enterprise, including myself.

As a black woman professional, the mistreatment of those who look like me isn’t new. There are copious studies done on the treatment of black women in the workplace. I’ve added a diagram below that speaks to this all-too-common phenomenon. There is always a honeymoon phase for a Black Woman entering any organization, and the enterprise has proven not to be different:

² Janieve Williams Comrie, Antoinette M. Landor, Ph.D., Kwyn Townsend Riley, Jason D. Williamson, Esq., “AntiBlackness, Colorism” (2022) Boston University.



The “Problem” Woman of Colour in the Workplace



Adapted from "The Chronicle of the Problem Woman of Color in a Non-Profit" by the Safehouse Progressive Alliance for Nonviolence
www.coco-net.org

My honeymoon phase at the enterprise lasted for five months. I believe I have gone through each of these phases at the enterprise, and that’s unfortunate. When I started to discuss a significant Black History Month celebration sponsored by the enterprise for the community, I felt a shift in several leaders. The central theme from August to the present was that the enterprise leadership would put up every barrier to ensure that I failed. I felt strong antiblack sentiment at every turn, including being accused of reverse racism by Brad Cousins in the CAO. Even though the event happened, it was still a complete failure of the enterprise, on multiple levels.

- Communications
 - Initially, there was no opportunity to promote according to the CAO and CFO. When there was an opportunity, communications failed to promote the event only posting twice on the city’s social media.
- Procurement Process
 - Procurement purposely misguided me as a new department head. It slowed down the process causing much confusion to people already invited to participate and others who were asked to participate less than a week before the event.
- Fake Ethics Complaints
 - There were two fake ethics complaints against me during the planning of the Expo.

- CM Vetaw’s defamation of me as a city leader
 - I will discuss in detail later in this document regarding the I Am Expo.

However, as a leader, I didn’t fail because, against all odds, I brought something to the residents of Minneapolis that no one else in the enterprise has – a celebration of Black contributions, Black excellence, and Black History. “Success is to be measured not so much by the position one has reached in life, as by the obstacles which one has overcome while trying to succeed.”³

Fake Ethics Complaints

On October 4th, 2022, I met with Lori Johnson, Susan Trammel, and Pam Fernandez about an ethics violation against me. I was raising funds as a department head for our Black History Month event. The meeting was labeled Black Business Week, so we were well into the meeting before I understood what was happening. My takeaways:

- I wasn’t a department head yet, and Susan Trammel seemed incredibly upset about the vote later that day to place my department at the executive level. She voiced her concerns to me about that in the meeting.
- I had spoken with the mayor’s office and council president’s office about fundraising – neither of which informed me that it would be unethical. Mychal from the mayor’s office promised to get me Target as one of the funders. CP Jenkins said she’d use her platform to raise funds as well.

I explained to Susan Trammel that I was speaking to foundations, which is allowed but somehow the rules changed just for me. “This is often the life of a BIPOC employee, one that includes a constant overt or perceived double standard where the goalposts move for us but not for others.”⁴ The council, at the Special Session on February 17th, 2023, also were dumbfounded that I wasn’t allowed to acquire funds from foundations. The City Attorney, Kristyn Anderson, said it was an ethics violation because I was actively asking. However, that wasn’t the case. I was actively taking meetings with foundations about their grant process for the Expo.

Susan Trammel repeatedly reinforced, backed by Lori Johnson, that I could not ask foundations for funds, and any funds promised would have to be sent back to those organizations. She suggested I get a partner that the city approves of to take over funding and operations of the event. Susan Trammel named a few white-led organizations as examples. When I pushed back, she reiterated that the city had to approve the 501c3 that I partnered with. I took that as make sure your nonprofit isn’t too Black.

I asked Susan Trammel if this ethics violation was written or if there was a reprimand. She responded, “no, because you didn’t know, and you haven’t taken the leadership ethics class and signed the ethics document that all department heads sign.” Since officially becoming a department head, I still haven’t seen this document.

On October 5th, 2022, I was informed by Heather Johnston that while I was away at a conference, someone had made a complaint that I deemed my workspace “Blacks Only” by placing a sign and saying those words out loud. At the time, I had a multiracial team. But it wasn’t just the lie that bothered me; it

³ Laura Morgan Roberts, Anthony J Mayo, “Toward a Racially Just Workplace”, November 2019, Harvard Business Review.

⁴ Andrea Hill, “Changing the Rules, Changes the Game and Not for the Better”, Nov 2021, Momentum Nonprofit Partners.

was the fact that no one took the time to walk down to my space to see if it was true. It is the fact that I've moved into this shared space with Public Works, and I believed this to be an attempt to create an uncomfortable area for myself and my team. It is also a defamation of character. This incident made my team, and I miss being in the mouse-infected, windowless space. False complaints are how toxic work environments are born.

On October 11th, 2022, I met with Margaret Anderson Kelliher, who informed me that she knew about the complaint (that I had placed a Blacks Only sign in my space) and hinted that she knew who made the complaint. But she wouldn't tell me who made the complaint. I asked her if she walked down to my space to verify whether it was true, and she replied, no.

Although I was asked by Heather Johnston multiple times to let it go, on October 12th, 2022, I filed an ethics complaint against the person or persons that filed their false complaint.

On November 3rd, 2022, I met with Robin Howard to discuss the complaint. Soon after, the complaint was dismissed, but I have no idea why, how, or what decision was made to reprimand the individual.

Misguidance:

“The moving of the goalposts for me, as an African American female, versus other colleagues has been a normal occurrence in my career, as many BIPOC leaders have experienced. Whether this is intentional bias or not, it hurts.”⁵

Various persons in procurement have told me many times how I should handle the contracts for the I Am Expo. On October 13th, 2022, the single source contract for the event planner, Touched Apparel, went out for signatures. Once Heather Johnston received the contract, she refused to sign it at the advice of Pam Fernandez. Pam, who allowed the entire process to go through until that point said she allowed it because she knew it would never be signed, and informed Heather that she was afraid of me, so she didn't say no. Saying that you fear a black professional is a racist trope, and Pam should have been reprimanded for that comment. She wasn't afraid of me then, and she's not afraid of me now. It alludes that I did something or said something inappropriate to her to make her fear me. Those types of statements cause Black people to lose income, promotions, and sometimes their life. It is not okay.

- I was told by a CAO attorney, Brad Cousins, that I couldn't have only Black people performing at the Black History Month's I Am Expo.
 - Brad Cousins refused to sign contracts for the performers until I opened up the process for other races. Dushani Dye backed his assertion.
 - Brad Cousins told me that what I was doing was illegal – having only Black people perform.
- Unauthorized background checks were performed by the CFO and CAO offices.
 - Lori Johnson admitted she investigated the artists who were enlisted to perform at the expo to ensure that no one said anything bad about Minneapolis.
 - Heather Johnston said she didn't want a bash Minneapolis event, and the people I selected made her nervous. She asked me to explain to my selections that this event has to be positive, and no negative mentions about the enterprise.

⁵ Laura Hill, “Changing the Rules, Changes the Game and Not for the Better”, Nov 2021, Momentum Nonprofit Partners.

- Heather Johnston asked me to remove Brian Smith from the breakfast program portion of the expo because he's too controversial and he makes the mayor uncomfortable.
- Heather Johnston then proceeded to cancel the breakfast, citing timing of food by policy (we couldn't pay for food served at 9am), but it was picked up and paid for by Agape.
- During the planning of the I Am Expo event, I lost my ability to lead.
 - I was called into a meeting with Council Leadership, City Clerk, CAO, COO, Deputy COO, CFO, Chief of Staff, and the mayor to discuss the sabotage of the event by his leadership team. The night before, Heather Johnston wrote a memo and said she had proof to dispute my claims from several procurement team employees. I asked for the evidence, as it was in a memo, and she couldn't supply that proof, but the information from the memo didn't change.
 - Heather Johnston assigned Fatima Moore to process and approve items.
 - The procurement team wouldn't move on anything without Fatima's approval. I expressed to Fatima that this is disrespectful of my department head status.

I am attaching to this document the timeline of misinformation, misguidance, and veiled racism from the CAO and procurement office regarding the I Am Expo.

In the book *The Antiracist Organization, Dismantling Systemic Racism in the Workplace*, the author, Shereen Daniels, describes the bullet points above, "We are punished rather than rewarded for doing anything that seeks to improve the experiences of people who look like us. In some cases, (for instance, with Brad Cousins), this is referred to as reverse racism and is actively discouraged lest we be accused of favoring our own."

Other instances that occurred outside of the Expo, that I believe were based in extra scrutiny, and moving goalposts:

- I am constantly told things that I want are against policy but never shown such policy. Whenever I ask for a policy, I'm given the standard, "the policy is currently being written."
 - On March 1st, 2023, I was informed by Heather Johnston that a leadership conference I would be attending on March 7th, 2023, does not qualify as leadership development. I asked her who decides what is and is not a leadership conference.
 - Heather Johnston contacted Dawn Baker, Vince Therrien, and Nikki Odom about the conference – which isn't standard practice, especially for conferences for department heads, for clarity.
 - There aren't any other department heads that need the permission of Heather Johnston or Learning and Development to go to conferences.
 - Dawn Baker also mentioned in her email that "the policy" isn't developed. I'm being held to a policy that doesn't exist.
 - Heather Johnston told me I would have to pay the city for the conference and take PTO to attend.
- Sometime in November, I was told by Heather Johnston, that I must reapply for my position as director of the REIB – a position I fought for before arriving with my counteroffer and after my first day.

- During all of the conversations with Heather Johnston or the mayor’s office, I wasn’t told that I’d be asked to reapply for the director position after my division became a department.
- I believe I was asked to reapply because Brian Smith’s division was made a department, and I see this as a way to ensure that he won’t get the department head job. But if you do it to Brian, you’d do it to me.

No Resources for Projects:

On October 25th, 2022, I gave a budget presentation on the three change items for my department. After that meeting, I was told by Heather Johnston that the presentation could have been longer. I told her I could not say much about the three change items. She said I should have taken that time to talk about the work of the department.

The guidance I received from the budget office was to stick to the mayor’s recommendations. I asked if this was the time to ask for more funds and was told absolutely not. The slides were prefilled in for me. But my supervisor thought I should have done more. “There’s data that demonstrates the unfortunate reality: Black workers receive extra scrutiny from bosses, which can lead to worse performance reviews, lower wages, and even job loss.”⁶

“There were 125 resolutions reviewed for content related to the history of racism, reference to racial health equity data, content related to action steps or implementation, and any accompanying funding or resources. We found that the majority of policies name racism as critical in addressing racial inequities with limited details about specific actions, funding, or resources.”⁷ Here is a list of the work of my department, which is quite the heavy lift, but we’re getting it done.

- Antiracism Training
 - On September 28th, 2022, I received a call from Heather Johnston who had heard from the union reps about our training. She asked, “can you explain why you told Dan McConnell that he couldn’t help write the curriculum?” I replied, he admitted he has no knowledge of antiracism training, has never written one, and wants to be able to tell me what I can and can’t have in the training.
 - I still feel pressured to center whiteness by bending to the will of the union reps, who shouldn’t be able to weigh in on something they do not know.
- SREAP (Strategic Racial Equity Action Plan)
 - SREAP was set to expire on December 31st, 2022. We have an extension to June 30th, 2023 for departments to complete their work.
 - CP Jenkins wants the new council to decide what to do with SREAP in 2024.
- Minneapolis (in)Equity Report
 - Hiring a data analyst.
 - Framework completed.
- Truth and Reconciliation

⁶ Deborah Ashton, “Does Race or Gender Matter More to Your Paycheck?”, 2014, Harvard Business Review.

⁷ Frontiers in Public Health, Racism as Public Health Crisis: Assessment and Review of Municipal Declarations and Resolutions Across the United States.

- Hired two FTEs, one Black, one Indigenous to lead the work.
- Creating a framework to move the work forward.
- Applying for grants to fund the work.
- Racism as a Public Health Emergency
 - Strategy completed.
 - Survey completed.
 - Framework established.
 - Waiting for funding.
- Trans Equity
 - Currently, the transequity summit is the priority.
 - Policy formulations.
 - Staffing the committee.
 - Newly hired person will shape the work to be more expansive.
 - Hiring a LGBTQIA+ Manager to lead this division.
- Community of Practice
 - Continuing work of the bodies of culture, and white body groups.
- Racial Healing Strategy
 - This is a strategy that Heather Johnston asked me to lead and create.
 - Strategy completed – waiting for funding.
- REIA (Racial Equity Impact Analysis)
 - REIA has been revamped, and ready for use by the enterprise.
- Mayor’s Climate Initiative
- Transportation Equity in conjunction with Public Works
- 3rd Precinct Workgroup
- George Floyd Square
- Immigration Workgroup
- Human Trafficking
 - Shune Shrestha leads this work for the team.

None of the projects are fully funded, but the Antiracism Training (ART) has a \$40,000 budget per year to train 4500 employees. I was told by Heather Johnston that ART would be the focus in 2023 and that she would find funding for it. But all other initiatives will have to wait until 2025 or find grant funding for them. For one initiative, the Racial Healing Strategy, Heather wanted to use Bloomberg Funds from Brian Smith’s budget to pay for it partially. However, that partial payment wouldn’t be enough to get started.

Intentional action is necessary to move the declarations from the performative space to actual antiracism intervention. As racism was structurally embedded into systems, interventions will need to occur at all levels, including within government and policy. Moving forward, it is clear that antiracism action items will require the environment (e.g., “political will”) for implementation and may differ at various levels (the local, state, and national level). “Further, as these are complex issues that have existed for centuries, the financial commitment to funding antiracism interventions will need to extend over a

significant period of time. Abrupt ending to funding will only replicate the band-aid solutions that have not worked in the past.”⁸

Lies Spread by CP Jenkins and CM Vetaw:

“The hearts, psyches, and souls of African Americans have also been routinely attacked by another group: ourselves. Many African Americans berate themselves and each other for being Black, for being too Black, for being less than perfect, or for simply existing”.⁹

On October 4th, 2022, I received word from several council aides and department heads that CP Jenkins was spreading rumors about the lack of work coming from Race & Equity. I began my tenure with the enterprise on March 28th, 2022. Six months into the job, the expectation from the council president was that I should have solved racism in the enterprise. Prior to my arrival, Truth and Reconciliation were stagnant, SREAP was slowing to a halt, and Racism as a Public Health Emergency hadn’t moved at all. At the time CP Jenkins was making such statements, we had done more on her initiatives in 6 months than she had in 2 years. As far as I understand, we are now just waiting for funding – which won’t come for quite some time. The lies from CP Jenkins create and perpetuate a toxic work environment centered on racism.

“Toxic means “poisonous” and/or “causing unpleasant feelings; harmful or malicious.” In the workplace, toxicity can take several forms. ClearForce CEO Tom Miller says it can be anything from bullying or harassment to a company that engages in unethical practices and is dishonest with its employees.”¹⁰

On November 14th, 2022, I met with council leadership concerning an SREAP presentation that Skyler Nash would give to the Committee of the Whole (COW). Skyler wasn’t feeling well, so I stood in for him. During that meeting, CP Jenkins says, “I haven’t heard from Race Equity; I mean, are y’all even working?”. I didn’t appreciate the suggestion, nor did I appreciate that my supervisor did nothing to dispute it. In fact, I sadly believe that Heather Johnston fanned the flames of the accusation. “Being a black woman in America means realizing that doing everything right may not be enough.”¹¹

On November 14th, 2022, Heather Johnston came to my office and told me I’d have to give a presentation to the council president to ensure her that I was working. I was livid as the council had literally just voted to separate the government via the newly adopted government structure. The council is legislative, and the rest of us are administrative. Council has to go through the executive office to ask anything of the administrative branch—especially any council directive. I complied because what Heather Johnston asked didn’t seem like a request but a requirement. Please remember that I had been with the enterprise for barely seven months. Most of my team had been employed by the enterprise for 2-4 months. Most of my team is of color, with the majority being Black.

On November 22nd, 2022, my team and I outlined our work to CP Jenkins and her staff. CP Jenkins, during that meeting, was disrespectful and belligerent. She cut me off on each slide to air her grievances on how she should be in the know about everything my department does. After the presentation, I

⁸ Frontiers in Public Health, Racism as Public Health Crisis: Assessment and Review of Municipal Declarations and Resolutions Across the United States.

⁹ Resmaa Menakem, “My Grandmother’s Hands”, 2017, Central Recovery Press.

¹⁰ Mark C Perna, “Toxic Work Culture Is The #1 Factor Driving People To Resign”, June 1, 2022, Forbes.

¹¹ Brittany Cooper, “Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower”, 2018, Africana Studies at Rutgers University.

informed her that I knew about the rumors, the lies, and what she's said to other department heads about "coming after me." She didn't deny it but agreed to take me up on my offer to start over with a clean slate. Unfortunately, that clean slate didn't last long.

"When we talk about toxic work environments as Black women, one component we often leave out or glaze over is how some Black women leaders make the lives of other Black women in their organization a living hell. This is a chronic problem that we rarely talk about, if we ever address it at all."¹²

I have also attached the work slate that we presented to CP Jenkins and subsequently to every city councilor. On November 23rd, 2022, I met with Fatima Moore and Heather Johnston to discuss CP Jenkin's behavior the day before. I was told that CP Jenkin's racism could be attributed to her declining health.

Blacks can utilize Antiblackness and racism against other Blacks. During our Metamorphosis kickoff meeting, CP Jenkins, while expressing the importance of the antiracism training, informed the department heads in the room that she is antiblack, homophobic, and transphobic. Those of us who work in antiracism and are experts in our field know this to be accurate, as do scholars at Boston University.

"And to be clear, one does not have to be white to contribute to anti-Blackness or adopt anti-Black attitudes. In fact, anti-Black racism is not just about the racial oppression of Black people by whites, but by other racial and ethnic groups as well, all of which have themselves been heavily influenced by white supremacy. Indeed, anti-Blackness and anti-Black racism reside and thrive within institutions and ideologies of white supremacy, whiteness, and fear of Blackness and have a profound effect on anyone forced to engage with those institutions and ideologies, irrespective of their own racial or ethnic background."¹³ In other words, CP Jenkins and CM Vetaw create an unsafe and unhealthy work environment for Black people.

CM Vetaw began her antiblack sentiment against me when I sat on a particular side of the council chambers during Heather Johnston's appointment hearing. Since then, whenever I step into council chambers, she sneers at me; I catch her staring at me with disgust several times during the hearing, even when I'm not slated to speak. I'm not the only one who notices, as others have pointed it out to me, including my Step-Up kids from last summer. One of the kids whispered to me when he saw, "I think she hates you."

"Even among Black and brown people themselves, the claws of anti-Blackness have taken hold, leading many Black people (and communities) to internalize this sense of inferiority and question their own worth, both as individuals and as a collective."¹⁴

CM Vetaw has made it her mission to spread lies and defame my character with the community regarding the I Am Expo. She contacted KSTP and informed them I didn't hire anyone from Minneapolis

¹² Carey Yazeed, *Why Black Women Hurt Each Other in the Workplace*, November 2021

¹³ Janvieve Williams Comrie, Antoinette M. Landor, Ph.D., Kwyn Townsend Riley, Jason D. Williamson, Esq., "AntiBlackness, Colorism", (2022) Boston University.

¹⁴ Janvieve Williams Comrie, Antoinette M. Landor, Ph.D., Kwyn Townsend Riley, Jason D. Williamson, Esq., "AntiBlackness, Colorism", (2022) Boston University

to work the event. She had several community members call me to curse me out, and they told me that CM Vetaw instructed them to do it. I emailed CM Vetaw and copied Heather Johnston to get her to stop. That email went unresponded to by everyone who was copied. She also told the vendors from Minneapolis not to show up to the Expo because "Director Green is not on the up and up." Most recently, CM Vetaw has expressed to several city council members that I own Touched Apparel LLC and paid myself by selecting Touched Apparel LLC. This is unacceptable and needs to stop. I am filing a lawsuit against CM Vetaw for defamation and slander.

The week of February 27th, 2023, I had an incredible amount of stress which was exacerbated by emails from Heather Johnston asking for headcount numbers for the Expo AFTER informing her that I needed a mental health break, and forwarding me emails from CM Vetaw's personal friends with complaints about the Expo. It's hard for me to believe that Heather didn't know about CM Vetaw's antics as they were seen together at the Expo. And CM Vetaw hasn't been shy with sharing her disdain for me and the work of racial justice. "The chronic stress of experiencing discrimination can gradually erode people's physical well-being over time," according to Mary Bassett, director of the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University.

Bassett was one of several experts quoted in a June 12th, 2020, article in The Guardian about the links between racism and health. She cited studies showing that people who experience years of microaggressions develop heart disease more rapidly than others; that stress from frequent racist encounters leads to chronic low-grade inflammation in black women. The City of Minneapolis' enterprise is detrimental to my physical and emotional well-being.

I understand that this lawsuit against a sitting council member will cause headaches for the enterprise. However, I am reminded of a quote by Dr. Janice Gassam Asare, "When leadership is trying to make sense of someone who does something that is racist, it shouldn't matter if they're high performing, if they are creating a toxic and hostile work environment. But leadership is very shortsighted, and they keep the person because they have a high ROI." I have to do this to repair my image from the damage the council member has done, with or without the support from leadership.

Resignation:

On February 21st, 2023, I resigned. After going back and forth with procurement, Heather Johnston, and the CAO for months, I believe they all gave one more concerted effort to end the I Am Expo. That morning, I was told that the procurement team would not pay Chrom for their services in building the convention center. I was gaslit that day by Brad Cousins, who claimed he never advised me to sign the contract. The two people in that meeting, Dushani Dye and Lori Johnson, did not back me up. I added the mayor to the email thread and asked that he and Heather Johnston step in. Here's what Heather wrote:

Tyestia,

If there is not a contract with Chrome, I'm not sure what we can do. All of the vendors were supposed to submit as a part of the procurement process. I'm concerned about the increase in cost as well. Perhaps the scope should be scaled back to keep within the \$140k. You may need to reach out to Touched Apparel to see if they are able to pay.

Chrom was scheduled to begin the build the following day, and the city was refusing to pay.

I received a phone call and email from Karen Moe, who stated she never used to procurement process to use Chrom as they are the exclusive choice of the Minneapolis Convention Center (MCC). She has held events at the MCC several times. Procurement reached out to her team to ask questions about the times she used Chrom. Here is the email she sent:

Director Green,

I am sharing this information with you in case it is helpful for planning the I Am Expo. Historically NCR has not had a contract with Chrome; instead the Convention Center has required us to work with their vendors. We just receive the invoice and make the payment. Brad Cousins is our departments CAO. And I know I have run the Convention Center contract by him, but he has informed me that I do not need to do that as they are a City department.

Let me know if you have any questions.

Karen

From: Ngo, Nicholas <Nicholas.Ngo@Minneapolismn.gov>

Sent: Wednesday, February 22, 2023 12:03 PM

To: Buchanan, Kamal <kamal.buchanan@minneapolismn.gov>

Cc: Moe, Karen (she/her/hers) <karen.moe@minneapolismn.gov>

Subject: RE: Question; Community Connections invoice

Hi Kamal,

Happy to assist. NCR does not obtain quotes and/or go out for bid from other vendors for the Community Connections Conference. We contract directly with the Convention Center and are issued vendors from the Convention Center to work with in the event planning process.

*NCR annually meets with Convention Center staff to tour and procure a space in the center. We discuss that year's potential expo design and/or physical space needs and they assist in determining what's possible. A contract is then drafted and signed with the Convention Center. From there, event supports such as a Convention Center Event Planner, Convention Center audio-visual support, Kelber and **Chrom** Expo, etc... are assigned. NCR staff works with the designated liaisons in the planning process and are issued an invoice after the conference concludes. The invoice is submitted and routed for payment through the City's standard payment process.*

If there are any questions, please feel free to contact me.

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Earlier that day, I received an email from Casper Hill asking about vendors for the Expo being from Minneapolis. I later learned that this was an effort from CM Vetaw to discredit the Expo with lies and leak those lies to the media. But Heather Johnston went further, asking for only Minneapolis vendors and performing artists. No one from anywhere else in the twin cities. I believed this was an attempt to validate CM Vetaw's lies. I sent the entire list to KSTP, and that story never aired.

No one batted an eye when I said the event was canceled. However, soon after I sent my written resignation to Heather Johnston and Fatima Moore, the powers that be finally took me seriously. And miraculously, they figured out a way to pay Chrom so the event could still happen. Nevertheless, I was still held back from fully promoting the event, with only four days to showtime.

My decision to resign was from pure exhaustion, and my body, mind, and spirit could no longer take the racist, toxic nature of the enterprise. The week prior, I had begun having chest pains and anxiety attacks – while medicated with antianxiety meds and trouble sleeping. “Bassett said that other research has found links between the constant stress of being marginalized with a phenomenon called “weathering”—accelerated aging on a genetic level.^{15”}

Although I had no idea how to pay my bills and support my family, a huge weight was lifted. I would no longer have to swim in the waters of racism and antiblackness. “Racism—both interpersonal and structural—negatively affects the mental and physical health of millions of people, preventing them from attaining their highest level of health,”¹⁶ I was no longer willing to allow the enterprise to affect my health. The current culture of the enterprise isn’t sustainable for any of us.

After speaking with Fatima Moore, I rescinded my resignation. I took off the week of February 27th, 2023, as a mental health break. Profound changes need to be made to the culture of the enterprise. As a Minneapolis citizen, I demand it. As a leader in the enterprise, I won’t stop demanding it and holding folks accountable until we all see it come to pass.

Conclusion:

After nearly a year in the enterprise, I wholly understand why the entire Race & Equity division dismantled and chose to do this work elsewhere. The common theme I heard from the enterprise about the division’s choice to leave was that they were tired – the George Floyd murder and subsequent uprising was too much for them. After speaking with those former employees in detail, and now experiencing the enterprise myself, I can confidently say that was not the case. Yes, they were tired, but it was from the constant abuse from the enterprise – not the murder of George Floyd. The human body can only take so much, especially when you know the enterprise isn’t ready for the type of change required. The enterprise isn’t structured in a way that automatically supports racial equity. The city needs a supportive leadership team and public officials who want an antiracist work environment. I don’t believe the city as an enterprise is concerned about having an antiracist organization. The city, as an enterprise, is concerned about optics.

My favorite person in the world is the late Toni Morrison. Her words are timeless and can be used decades after she murmured them. Here is what Ms. Morrison, who summed up my experience in the enterprise, said, “The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language, and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn’t shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you

¹⁵ Maanvi Singh, “‘Long overdue’: lawmakers declare racism a public health emergency”, June 12, 2020, The Guardian.

¹⁶ CDC Office of Minority Health, 2021.

dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.”

Next Steps:

I’m taking vacation the week of March 6th returning March 14th.

I have begun the process to file a lawsuit against CM Latrisha Vetaw for defamation and slander.

I am formally asking the City of Minneapolis to investigate what happened during the procurement process for the I Am Expo.

I am formally asking the City of Minneapolis to investigate and reprimand individuals for their racist acts, creating and sustaining a toxic work environment, regardless of the race, or proximity to power of those individuals.