

Wednesday, September 13, 2017

Multnomah County Board of Commissioners
501 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd, Suite 600
Portland, Oregon 97214

Dear Board of County Commissioners:

We write to you as concerned community leaders of color about the apparent trajectory the County is on with respect to leaders of color at Multnomah County. It has come to our attention that the Health Department, under the direction of Joanne Fuller, has orchestrated the ouster of one of our community's respected and highly accomplished leaders --without cause-- Tricia Tillman.

It is deeply disconcerting that the County would remove Oregon's first black director of public health and one of the highest-ranking African-Americans in the county. This is incongruent with the values of equity, diversity and inclusion so central to the county and the board's mission. It is ironic that this should happen to Tricia, of all people, who was a critical architect in much of the equity work that was implemented throughout the county and health department.

Given that there are no African-American females currently directing any department at the County and there is no record of her performance being sub-standard, the question of why she was pushed out remains. There is serious concern that County and health department protocols weren't followed and Tricia was never given the opportunity to understand what was wrong or find ways to improve.

What is clear is that her work mattered. She has been the visionary around the implementation of many public health initiatives and was notably effective at building community partnerships with organizations that are often left out and marginalized. She

has worked across communities of color to effectively catalyze change and push public health beyond the boundaries of what it had typically been within these communities.

We believe it is unacceptable that someone living out the County's mission of equity in community would be pushed out in the manner outlined above. Our fear is that this is a systemic pattern Multnomah County has developed when interacting with employees and leaders of color. It is critical that people of color are given opportunity to lead and engage with the County in culturally specific ways. They should be able to do so without the threat of losing their jobs or slander to their reputations.

We are currently living in a time where there is much hatred towards communities of color both locally and nationally. From gentrification, to the increase in bullying, to attacks on DACA; the accumulation of these actions heightens awareness of racial tensions and bias. As such, the community is more aware than ever when injustice rears its head. This case is one of those times.

To this end, we request an immediate meeting with you to discuss this matter and the County's stated approach towards employees and leaders of color. Our communities have worked too hard and too long to allow such actions to be taken without account. We call on you to right this troubling course.

Respectfully,

Kali Thorne Ladd Lorenzo Poe Sen. Avel Gordly (Ret.) Ron Herndon
Tony Hopson Joseph Santos-Lyons Dr. T. Allen Bethel Joyce Harris
Rukaiyah Adams Kayse Jama Sen. Margaret Carter (Ret.) Alberto Moreno
Cyreena Boston Ashby Pastor W.G.Hardy Jr.