



October 6, 2017

VIA E-MAIL & U.S. MAIL

JonLarry@co.walton.fl.us

Mr. Larry Jones
County Administrator
Walton County Administration
76 North 6th Street
DeFuniak Springs, FL 32433

RE: *Dede Hinote*

Dear Mr. Jones:

This law firm has been retained to represent Dede Hinote, Deputy County Administrator of Administration. As you know, Ms. Hinote is a dedicated and long-term employee who has worked with Walton County for nearly her entire career. It has come to our attention that Ms. Hinote has been subjected to several instances of discrimination and harassment and other unlawful behavior in (and arising out of) the workplace. As the County Administrator, you are the Chief Executive Officer for Walton County and Ms. Hinote's direct supervisor and, thus, this letter is directed to you. In sum, Ms. Hinote has been subjected to discrimination based on sex and has experienced aggressive and hostile behavior from at least one Walton County official, including at least one member of the Walton County Board of County Commissioners, which has created fear in Ms. Hinote and subjected her to emotional distress.

Ms. Hinote has been the subject of sex-based discrimination based on her protected status as a female in several ways. Walton County, at the direction of the Cecilia Jones, the Chair of the County Commissioners, has re-assigned Ms. Hinote from her usual duties, including but not limited to prohibiting Ms. Hinote from traveling and attending continuing education courses and conferences directly related to her job duties and for which she historically attended. Ms. Hinote's job responsibilities have been reassigned to her male counterpart (Deputy County Administrator of Operations) including presentations at Board meetings and reassignment of other projects. Furthermore, Walton County frequently recognizes, acknowledges, and gives credit to her male counterpart for work performed or tasks successfully completed by Ms. Hinote. In addition, despite the recommendations of the grand jury, the Chair continues to interfere in the day to day operations of County government.

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As Ms. Hinote previously reported to you, Commissioner Jones' husband (Jerry Jones) has harassed Ms. Hinote. Mr. Jones has made several unfounded complaints against Ms. Hinote with the State Attorney, Property Appraiser, and Supervisor of Elections. Mr. Jones previously drove by Ms. Hinote's home in Walton County. As you know, Ms. Hinote's parents were murdered two years ago and Ms. Hinote recently moved into her parents' home, which is just over the Holmes County line. Mr. Jones was also found waiting for Ms. Hinote at the end of her driveway one morning as Ms. Hinote was pulling out to go to work. When Mr. Jones was confronted as to why he was parked outside her house, Mr. Jones unpersuasively explained he was looking for someone else's house, at 7:30 am on that road in Holmes County. Ms. Hinote reported this to you and Ms. Jones, who did nothing to address this behavior. Furthermore, on many mornings, Mr. Jones parks his car in the Walton County parking lots of several County offices in DeFuniak Springs and monitors employees' comings and goings, including Ms. Hinote's. It is a known fact that Mr. Jones carries a weapon and, thus, Mr. Jones' continued harassment, condoned and ratified by Ms. Jones, creates a reasonable fear of injury to Ms. Hinote and subjects her to emotional distress.

It has also been reported that there's an unofficial "hit list" created by at least one elected official and generated in an effort to target employees throughout the County to terminate. The intentional scheming by one of the County Commissioners "to get" Ms. Hinote is memorialized in an email communication from such County Commissioner. This creates an unreasonable fear in these public servants that they will lose their jobs and livelihood, including Ms. Hinote (and other long time, non-partisan County employees). This is harassing behavior and a blatant abuse of power by these elected officials.

Ms. Hinote has an exemplary record of performing her job duties with a complete absence of any negative reviews or discipline over the more than 25 years of her public service with Walton County. Obviously, this is not the course of action that Ms. Hinote would have preferred as she values her job, Walton County residents, and her co-workers. However, at this time, she feels she has no other recourse. We request that you investigate this immediately, get to the bottom of it, and report it to the appropriate authorities. Ms. Hinote and I would also like to discuss this with you further; please give me a call once you've had a chance to review this letter.

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I would also remind you (and the Commissioners) that, in addition it to a violation of County policy, it is a violation of state and federal law to retaliate against employees for filing complaints and communicating with a supervisor or manager about employment discrimination, including harassment.

Sincerely,



Jennifer A. Sullivan

JAS/jms