

BENTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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SHERIFF JERRY HATCHER

COMMITTED TO OUR COMMUNITY

February 10, 2020

Human Resources
Attn: Lexi Wingfield
7122 W Okanogan Pl.
Kennewick, WA 99336

Re: Department Issue

Dear Lexi:

It is my understanding that there has (recently) been a complaint made by a Benton County Sheriff's Office employee (against me). While I am unaware of the nature of the complaint, I want to address the process going forward within the Sheriff's Office.

If the complaint is of criminal nature, the complaint needs to come to my office in accordance with RCW, and I will assign it to independent investigators to be investigated without delay. If the complaint is of a county policy violation and the county wishes to have it investigated, I will be assigning an independent Elected Sheriff to be part of the investigation to ensure the Office of the Sheriff is protected to the fullest extent in accordance with RCW and appropriate WACs.

As the Elected Sheriff I feel it is necessary for two reasons (1) This will ensure that we have a complete, non-biased investigation which protects the complainant's interest, the County's interest and the Office of the Sheriff. (2) Regarding conflicts of interest, the Counties HR department, who would be tasked with setting up this investigation, is directly controlled by County Commissioners; commissioners who openly have stated and shown their ongoing biases towards me personally, as the Elected Sheriff, and the actual Office of the Sheriff.

In addition, the Prosecutor's Office, who would be giving legal advice (or direction) in this investigation, has been very clear with me and my staff several times over the years, that when it comes to an issue between the Sheriff's Office and the Commissioner's Office, "they work for the County Commissioners", a clear conflict of interest.

TEAMWORK • INTEGRITY • COMMITMENT

Exhibit 6

While we all recognize that bringing in outside investigators can help control these clear biases, we also need to recognize that these contracted investigators are still directed and control by the Commissioners. The Commissioners either directly or indirectly set up the contract, pay for the contractors and/or ultimately determine the scope of the investigation which would control the end narrative.

Unfortunately, with this power, the County Commissioners office has a well-documented double standard when it comes to how County business is conducted and certainly how investigations are done. Investigations within the Commissioner's Office are conducted completely different than investigations being conducted in my office (examples can be provided if needed).

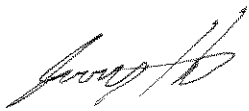
I, personally, have requested an investigation into this very subject and other violations of the County's anti-harassment policy. Unfortunately, and inexplicably, I have been met with nothing but resistance and delays in getting my complaints investigated.

Further, I have personally expressed these ongoing concerns, and stated biases, to the county's HR manager (Lexi). Finally, I have also expressed to her, my concerns about her office's neutrality being compromised for years, because it's under the direct control of the Commissioner's Office and her very job depends on their approval. She has acknowledged the concern.

If the HR department receives direction that does not allow this collaborative investigation, the Benton County Sheriff's Office will conduct its own independent internal investigation. It is my hope that we can work together to conduct an investigation that is both comprehensive and without bias; a fair investigation that does not get exploited for personal or political reasons. I look forward to your response and cooperation.

Sincerely,

BENTON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE



Jerry Hatcher, Sheriff