



Municipality of Anchorage
Mayor Dave Bronson

Date: January 13, 2023
To: Kent Kohlhase, Acting Municipal Manager
From: Jared Goecker, HR Deputy Director
Subject: Investigation into the hiring of Joe Gerace (Confidential: Attorney-Client/Deliberative Process)

The Human Resource Department (HR), in collaboration with the Municipal Manager's Office and the Municipal Attorney's Office, has been tasked with completing an internal review of the circumstances surrounding Mr. Joe Gerace's hiring last fall, and with verifying the professional experience, licenses/certifications, and educational degrees claimed on his resume.

Former Health Director

Mr. Gerace first contacted the Administration through a phone call with Ms. Portia Erickson (formerly, Portia Noble), and followed up with her in a July 12, 2021 email from his Visit Healthcare email account. In his email, Mr. Gerace represented that, among other things, he was a Lt. Colonel in the Alaska National Guard (ANG) and held two master's degrees:

Other pertinent medical background on me:

- Master's in Business Administration and Master's in Physician Assistant Studies . . .
- Lieutenant Colonel -Alaska Guard - Brigade Surgeon and HF-Medical member[.] (See 7/13/21 email from Portia Noble to David Morgan forwarding 7/12/21 email she received from Joe Gerace).

On September 15, 2021, Mr. Gerace was interviewed for the Anchorage Health Director position by former Chief of Staff, Sami Graham; Municipal Manager, Amy Demboski; and HR Director, Niki Tshibaka. The interview was on the Mayor's calendar as well. That same day, HR was notified to process his hiring paperwork as soon as possible, with an intended start date of September 17th, 2021. At that time, Mr. Gerace's resume was provided to the Employment Division of HR. His resume stated that he had two master's degrees and a bachelor's degree, in addition to significant work and volunteer experience that included Visit Healthcare, the Alaska State Defense Force (ASDF), the American Red Cross of Alaska, and other health and disaster management experience. His resume did not specifically state that he was part of the ANG, but it was worded in such a way that it gave that impression.

HR proceeded to process the hire as quickly as possible. Consistent with its existing process for direct executive appointments, which HR had used under previous administrations and as far back as HR staff with direct knowledge of the process can remember, HR did not verify Mr. Gerace's educational background, or contact any references, or verify his previous

employment. However, pursuant to its existing process, HR did perform a background check on Mr. Gerace (specifically, a criminal and credit check), which did not raise any red flags.

Mr. Gerace's name was put forward to the Assembly for confirmation, via OnBase, for the Assembly meetings of October 26th, 2021. During the confirmation process concerning allegations were made about Mr. Gerace. Some of these allegations were made anonymously. HR received six e-mail communications from individuals who had known Mr. Gerace in a professional capacity and who opposed his nomination (the Assembly received these communications as well). The e-mails were from former employees of Visit Healthcare, an American Red Cross of Alaska volunteer, and a municipal employee. HR also received 13 letters of recommendation in support of Mr. Gerace's confirmation from other individuals who had professional relationships with him (one individual submitted two recommendations on his behalf). These letters of recommendation came from Visit Healthcare's medical director, clinical lead nurse, and other employees; senior ranking officers in the ASDF (a Brigadier General and a Battalion Commander); municipal employees; and other professional colleagues. Mr. Gerace's letters of recommendation collectively substantiated his employment with Visit Healthcare, as well as his work with the ASDF and the American Red Cross of Alaska. Finally, Mr. Gerace also provided a copy of the ASDF Commendation Medal he received for his work in combatting the COVID-19 pandemic, and documentation corroborating his status as a licensed paramedic with the State of Montana. (See 11/9/2021 e-mail from Mr. Gerace to HR Director).

Because of the controversy surrounding Mr. Gerace's nomination, the Assembly postponed the confirmation vote multiple times while more information was gathered and held at least one work session on October 20th. The Assembly voted 7-3 to confirm Mr. Gerace on November 12th. As part of the confirmation process, the Assembly questioned Mr. Gerace in executive session, heard and questioned individuals who opposed his nomination, and received a written response from Mr. Gerace regarding the allegations that had been made about him from those who opposed his nomination. The Assembly also was provided all the recommendations in support of Mr. Gerace.

Following Mr. Gerace's resignation, HR carefully reviewed his resume. At this time, we can confirm the following:

- Mr. Gerace did have the work experience with Visit Healthcare, ASDF, and the American Red Cross of Alaska listed on his resume;
- Mr. Gerace did have the Advanced EMS Instructor, Advanced EMT, Basic EMS Instructor, and State of Montana paramedic certifications¹ listed on his resume;
- Mr. Gerace was called to active duty by the ANG as part of the Covid-19 response, as claimed on his resume; and
- Mr. Gerace *did not* receive any master's degrees, contrary to his claims on his resume.
- Mr. Gerace *did not* receive a bachelor's degree in chemistry or of any kind. Thus far, he has failed to provide any supporting documentation to substantiate his claim that he does have the degree. HR contacted the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC), which took over the records from Henry Cogswell College, Mr. Gerace's alleged alma mater, after it closed in the early 2000s. WSAC reports that there is no

¹ This was later revoked by the State of Montana

record of Mr. Gerace ever attending Henry Cogswell or receiving a bachelor's degree from that institution.

- HR has been unable to confirm Mr. Gerace's certification as an American Red Cross Advanced Disaster Instructor.

In conclusion, the historical process for appointing executives has been broken for years, including under prior Mayoral Administrations, and was not designed to detect the misrepresentations Mr. Gerace made on his resume. Accordingly, HR is in the process of developing and formalizing a detailed and robust new hiring process for executive appointments to ensure prior employment, educational degrees, relevant licenses/certifications, and candidates' qualifications are well-vetted in the future.

CONFIDENTIAL