

MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE



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April 8, 2024

The Anchorage Assembly
632 W. 6th Ave, Suite 150
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Re: Expectation of Respectful Behavior Toward Municipal Employees by the Assembly and Outside Counsel

Dear Members of the Anchorage Assembly and Legal Counsel to the Assembly,

This letter concerns behavior by an Assembly Member and outside legal counsel to the Assembly that occurred in the Municipal Attorney's Office on Thursday, April 4, 2024. I am writing to let you know the effect of this inappropriate and unprofessional behavior in our office, how similar disrespectful and unsafe behavior affects our Assistant Municipal Attorneys and our staff employees, and how it has diminished trust in the Assembly and Municipal government.

The Thursday meeting was attended by a member of Assembly leadership, Assembly counsel, and outside counsel. During that meeting, disrespectful and unprofessional behavior was displayed within the Municipal Attorney's Office. This behavior included name calling, grimacing, yelling through the halls of the Municipal Attorney's Office, and baseless personal attacks on an Assistant Municipal Attorney and on the department overall. This behavior was an apparent attempt to coerce an Assistant Municipal Attorney to comply with demands attempting to define the parameters of the visit. These tactics failed to intimidate the Assistant Municipal Attorney when she held firm to her ethical and professional duties in the face of this intimidation.

On April 4, the Assembly provided our department with four hours notice that Assembly leadership, Assembly outside counsel, and Assembly counsel would arrive at 1:00 pm the same day to view confidential legal documents in our conference room. We accommodated this late-noticed demand for departmental time and resources and reprioritized other obligations. However, the conduct during that meeting lacked professional decorum, displayed significant disrespect, and created an environment that caused a Municipal employee to feel intimidated, belittled, and shaken in the workplace. Due to this behavior, I must reconsider my "open invitation" to Assembly Leadership and their outside counsel to visit the Municipal Attorney's office or meet with staff.

The conduct I witnessed yesterday was unprecedented, and I cannot allow it to happen again.

Accordingly, I am considering that future visits from Assembly leadership and their outside counsel take place only after the Department of Law has been provided with adequate notice. An assigned Assistant Municipal Attorney will be present and will remain for all visits to this office. If Assistant Municipal Attorneys are invited by Assembly members or their counsel for meetings occurring outside of the Municipal Attorney's office, Assistant Municipal Attorneys may bring additional members of the Municipal Attorney's Office with them if they elect to do so.

The Municipal Attorney's Office is comprised of an impressive team of attorneys. 75% of the civil law department employees are women. Many are new to the State of Alaska and new to the Municipal Attorney's office. Several have served and worked for many years in various professional roles, including public service and government. Some of these roles include service to the Seattle City Attorney's Office, the Office of the Washington State Attorney General, the Massachusetts Legislature, the State of Alaska, the Alaska Court System, and borough governments. When employed at all these other government agencies, these attorneys were treated with respect by the people elected or appointed to public offices. It is reasonable to expect that same respect and professionalism from Anchorage's leaders—including me, the mayor, and all Assembly members.

The Municipality exists to serve the people of Anchorage. Municipal attorneys work for the Municipality of Anchorage and advise the Municipal Government, including the legislative branch, without regard for politics or power. Our loyalty is to the law. The way members of the Municipal Attorney's Office were treated on April 4, 2024, and on other occasions where they have been disrespected in public but not permitted to respond distracts employees from doing their work to serve the Municipal government as a whole. The Municipality will continue to lose talented people if Municipal employees are treated in this manner.

Upholding the safety, security, and wellbeing of my employees is of paramount importance to me. I appreciate your cooperation and hope you will join me in leading with respect and professionalism toward all Municipal personnel and the public.


Anne Helzer
Municipal Attorney

cc: Kent Kohlhase, Municipal Manager
Tyler Andrews, Human Resources Director
Dean Gates, Assembly Counsel