

PROUD TO MAKE AMERICA WORK

AMERICAN FEDERATION OF GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES (AFGE) -6th DISTRICT LOCAL 3599

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Greetings to the Membership,

This has been a powerful year for our local. There have been many battles fought and won. You may be aware of the battle on behalf of the Miami District Office. The relationship between the new Director and the Miami Office was very static. The working environment was choking the life out of the office. In an effort by the director to mold the office into a "model" work office, the impact of her actions was more destructive than constructive.

Working with the Chief Steward, Rachel Shonfield who is also that office's primary steward, and Gloria Allen, alternate we identified the issues that were affecting the members and immediately filed the appropriate union responses as they occurred. The result of our efforts led to the filing of 5 unfair labor practices (ULPs). These efforts went on for a year but we were able to have positive outcomes as a result of our hard work. The ULP complaints were issued by FLRA and have been settled. Also, several employees' PIP's were removed. The director's position is vacant. I am still involved in other workplace issues in that office regarding their intake and mail process.

I am also working on behalf of employees in the Birmingham DO, regarding their special intake unit. The Director decided to use her own discretion, instead of volunteers, to replace individuals in the unit and bypassed the union when making the decision, which also violated the past practice and a long standing MOU. I filed two ULP's on behalf of the BDO. I am in the process of settling both ULP's.

There have been other issues in the Birmingham DO that I initially tried to assist those employees with; i.e., mediator's upgrades, hostile work environment in a unit, but was asked to back off, I believe in fear of reprisal. It pains me to know that our people are working in this type of environment and are fearful of doing what it will take to change it. How can the agency and this office profess a "model" work place with this type of an environment?

The battle continues throughout our local. I am working diligently with our Chief Steward to protect the job of one of our office stewards in the Savannah LO. She is an employee of 23 years and is not at retirement age. She has a good performance record. The former director of her office and she did not have a positive working relationship. In fact, his choice of communicating with her was through emails. He was selected for a position in another office, however before he left he manufactured a case against the steward resulting in proposing her removal. When I initially reviewed the information submitted to support the proposed removal I could not believe what I was reading. My first reaction was that this is a witch hunt. As it

stands now we have done our homework, our stewards have assisted us, and we have responded to what I believe is a conspiracy to get rid of a union worker for non-work-related reasons. If this was a case before the EEOC I would prioritize it as an A1. However, the agency is being stubborn on this and probably will not want to resolve this without arbitration.

In the Tennessee area which I visited the Memphis DO this year I experienced an office whose morale was low. A new employee was detailed to a management position without consideration given to any other employee who may have qualified. While that employee was detailed he was sent to training for the position and while he was at training the job was announced, he applied, and was selected. I raised that issue with the Director during my visit. She did not think there was anything wrong. The Director used the “management right” defense. Well, this is one time that “management right” did not quite fit. My argument was that what management did in the exercising of their rights was give the appearance of pre-selection for the position and their actions had a chilling affect on any potential applicants for the job. The steward, Allen Hammond, filed a grievance. The union requested RESOLVE. At the RESOLVE meeting the director refused to counter the union’s first offer to settle. There was no good faith effort on management’s part to RESOLVE this issue. This complaint is at the settlement stage in headquarters.

In the Nashville office I participated in a RESOLVE with Rhonda Ellison, Steward, involving an incident where an employee received a disciplinary action for an incident that occurred 18 months prior. Management officials who participated in the RESOLVE did not participate in good faith. In fact, the day before the RESOLVE the employee was told by the management official that they were not going to remove the action. During the negotiation phase of the RESOLVE management failed to change their counter offer. The RESOLVE was not successful and a grievance has been filed.

The Memphis DO does not embrace the RESOLVE process. They show up but they do not participate. This issue has been brought to the attention of the RESOLVE manager. In the future we will review whether having RESOLVE with this offices management team is productive.

While it is easy to detect problems in our larger offices, our smaller offices problems sometimes go unnoticed. I visited the Jackson Area Office this year and, if in term, will be visiting Mobile and Savannah local offices. Usually in the small offices the management over-supervises the employees and they are denied benefits that larger office employees have. They work under fear and intimidation. In Mobile, they are not allowed to arrive to work before the Director and they do not have a key to the office. Their work environment is not that of a “model” work office.

Our Agency uses the word “model” work place often when it speaks about other businesses as well as the agency. I have come to realize that their definition for “model” can carry various meanings. Model like a scary movie (it would be interesting to really know what they mean by “model”). We are definitely not modeled like homes and gardens, better homes, architectural design. To be a model we have to be flexible to be able to take on the shape needed to meet the tasks. We work with the most inflexible leadership, who refuses to accept any

concepts or ideas from those who are at the forefront and involved with how to get the job done. We keep getting what we always get because they keep doing what they always do. There appears to be more self-interest among the leaders than there are mission interests.

I have been recently informed that the agency had a meeting and decided that the field workers needed more work and that they were not working hard enough because enough “numbers” were not being accomplished. As a result of their meeting, they decided to increase their expectations of the line workers so that they could look better. They do not care that the workload now is more than the staff can bear. They do not care that the customers are not going to get a quality product by increasing the workers goals. They do not care that the employees are already at their breaking point trying to do the right thing and provide quality work product. They just want to see the numbers. This plan for the “model” work force wants to increase the standard for an investigator to get an outstanding performance rating to the number 125 resolutions and for the mediator 88 successful resolutions. So you can be outstanding if you get rid of cases. Where are the findings of cause, merit resolutions in this equation? An employee could have processed 100 resolutions had 10 cause cases and 25 merit factor resolutions, but under this scenario, since they only resolved 100 cases they are not “outstanding.” This Agency has decided to run fighting discrimination like a factory. Giving production quotas to determine if you are successful or not. You cannot pick discrimination off of an assembly line. You have to develop the case, which takes time. You have to go off line, and it just may take awhile.

The Agency sets these unrealistic goals, adds more laws and procedures to the process yet, will not in good faith consider what is needed to get the job done properly and efficiently. I chaired the workgroup on presenting a different approach to our intake process. The agency sat on it until through continued contact with the Acting Chair, and Congress did they take time to review the proposal. The agency did what they always do. If it does not fit with what they want they focus on what will not work. Instead of bridging ideas to come up with a consensus plan that will work, all the agency has done is throw rocks at the Union's plan. I will continue to work with Council on this effort.

I am also working with Council President, Gabriel Martin on challenging the agency's stand on upgrades for Investigators. You deserve it. It will take a strategic well thought out plan for the agency to take us seriously. I believe we have sufficient information and we will be contacting the investigators to involve them in the process as we move forward.

The overtime settlement has yet to be finalized. One reason was that the former acting chair did not want to settle for the incoming Chair. Council President Martin and Chief Negotiator Levi are meeting with the new Chair and this issue is a priority with them. I expect we will hear something soon on this issue.

I have been contacted by some employees regarding some requests by headquarters. One of those requests is background information. The question is if you have to complete it and why now? The answer is, yes you do have to complete the information for your personnel records. Apparently even if you filled one out before, it was lost. However, we are confirming that medical information is voluntary.

The other question is regarding Individual Development Plans (IDPs). Should you complete one? The answer is yes. Here are some reasons why: (1) Is there some training you want to take? (2) OAA's, would you want to have some ISA training? (3) Investigators, would you like some mediation training? (4) And legal techs, how about paralegal training? (5) Attorneys/Certified Mediators/and Administrative Judges could get assistance to take state required continuing education. Put something down; do not turn in an empty sheet. In some offices the directors are actually funding the training.

As in past year's, the local made a strong showing at AFGE's Legislative Conference. Our three member team, consisting of Rachel Shonfield, Council Delegate, David Hamilton, Tampa Alternate, and myself visited over 30 offices of your members of Congress. We personally shared your concerns with them and the need for more funding, staff, and dedicated intake units. You can read more and see pictures at the "Legislative Corner" on our website, www.afge3599.org.

We have a strong local. We are held in high esteem at headquarters and in Congress. This is because we work together, we do our homework and we are professional. We help one another. I believe in training and development so that we can be properly equipped to support and represent the bargaining unit members. Each year when we meet there is a training session with your elected stewards. They are told to go back and share their training with the members. I hope they did.

We have quarterly calls among all office stewards and alternates where we share what is going on in our perspective offices and I share what is going on in my role as the President, and what news is from the Council. The Chief Steward shares pending actions and provides any legislative updates. Your office reps should be sharing this information with you. There are additional ways for you to stay up on what is happening with your union. I and any member of the executive board are available to participate in your office meetings provided we are given advance notice. If your office is not having union meetings let me know.

I would like to remind you that we have our own local web site (www.afge3599.org) and that the council 216(www.council216.org) has a web site and face book page for members only. Please take the time to join and check the web site. Please send us pictures and stories from employee appreciation events or other union activities for us to post.

There is a lot of information awaiting you. Take time and read and provide us with your input.

Thank you for your Support!

In Solidarity

Sharon D. Baker

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