

DRAFT

August 7, 2019

Bonnie Almond

Home Address

Re: Complaint Against Beaufort County Board of Education Trustee

Dear Ms. Almond:

I am writing to follow up on our meeting on June 26, 2019, during which we discussed the grievance you forwarded Dr. Herbert Berg on June 11, 2019, regarding an incident in your office on June 3, 2019, involving Beaufort County Board of Education Trustee Will Smith.

In your grievance, you state Mr. Smith came into your office unannounced and without an appointment. He then he sat down across from your desk and questioned you about the dress codes for graduation across the District. He directed you to send an email informing all District principals they had to allow students to decorate their caps and wear bow ties at graduation. You said he was loud and agitated in giving you that directive. You told Mr. Smith you would not send an email unless so directed by Dr. Berg and Mr. Smith then left your office.

You reported that you have observed Mr. Smith on multiple occasions walking around the District Office during work hours and interrupting employees who were working. You stated his conduct created a hostile work environment and an unnecessary distraction for staff. You also said you have seen Mr. Smith walking around outside the District Office on the weekends and that, when Mr. Smith enters the District Office building, he often does not enter through the front door, as do other visitors.

When I asked you during our meeting about the relief you were seeking, you stated you wanted Mr. Smith to follow the appropriate protocol and Board Policy related to interactions between Trustees and District employees. You also shared you were leaving the District effective June 30, 2019.

As I advised you during our meeting, the Board retained me to review and reach conclusions regarding your grievance. Based on the information you shared about Mr. Smith's actions, it is my opinion as an education law attorney who has worked with school districts and boards of trustees across the State for more than thirty years that Mr. Smith's actions were not in keeping with established protocol for Board members interacting with staff. My opinion is based on the School Board Member Ethical Principles promulgated by the South Carolina School Boards Association and on the Beaufort County Board of Education's Governance Policy 5.1 "Board-Superintendent Relationship." Policy 5.1 states that "the authority over, and accountability of, staff are the responsibility of the Superintendent" and that "the Superintendent is responsible for all matters related to the day-to-day operation of the BCSD within the parameters of Board Policies."

On behalf of the Board, I have shared your concerns and my conclusions about the June 3rd incident with District Superintendent Dr. Rodriguez. I understand Dr. Rodriguez is in the process of developing procedures to share with the Board concerning the impact of Board Governance Policy 5.1 and, specifically, how Trustees should interact with District employees outside of Board meetings and

committee meetings. Hopefully, the establishment and implementation of these procedures will result in a better understanding by Trustees of their role in the day-to-day operations of the District.

Thank you again for your willingness to talk with me. I wish you well in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Andrea E. White

Bc: Clifford Bush, Esq.