



OFFICE OF THE CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY

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Press Contact:
Jalyne R. Strong
(312) 603-5690
jrstrong@cookcountycourt.com

Clerk's Office Defends Promotions of Seasoned and Highly Qualified Employees

Sun-Times Reporter Attempts to Unjustly Tie Salary Increases to Campaign Contributions

(CHICAGO) In what appears to be an attempt to malign the professional careers of several long-term, exceedingly qualified employees of the Office of the Clerk of the Circuit Court of Cook County, *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Brian Slodysko insinuated in a telephone conversation with an employee that her and other employees' promotions and salary increases are based on something other than their job qualifications and years of service to the Clerk's Office.

In response, the Clerk's Office issued a statement to Mr. Slodysko noting that such tactics "appear to be underhanded as well as insulting to the experienced and hardworking employees of the Clerk's Office."

On March 20, 2014, Mr. Slodysko contacted the Clerk's Office seeking information to explain why five specific Clerk's Office employees had received substantial salary increases in the 2014 FY Budget. Questions about some of the staff promotions at the offices of the Assessor, the Sheriff and the Circuit Court Clerk had been raised by Commissioner Jeff Tobolski at the March 5, 2014 County Board meeting.

The Mr. Slodysko asked specifically about the salary increases of the following Clerk's Office employees:

Renee Banks, **hired July 1, 1985 (29 years)**, promoted to Chief Deputy Clerk, Criminal Department (salary increased by \$21,080.80); Samuel J. Williams, Jr., **hired Oct. 4, 1993 (21 years)**, promoted to Chief Deputy Clerk, District 6 – Markham (salary increased by \$18,767.84); Angela D. Robinson, **hired May, 2, 1994 (20 years)**, promoted to Assistant Chief Deputy Clerk, Criminal Division (salary increased by \$17,347.20); Ellie Marszewski, **hired April 17, 1989 (25 years)**, promoted to Assistant Chief Deputy Clerk, District 6 – Markham (salary increased by \$13,821.60); and Sherri Kolodzie, **hired July 8, 1987 (27 years)**, promoted to Assistant Chief Deputy Clerk, District 2 – Skokie (salary increased by \$12,238.72).

The Clerk's Office answered Mr. Slodysko's questions on March 24, 2014, with the following statement:

During the latter half of fiscal year 2013, the Clerk's Office had several senior level management staff positions to become vacant; as a result, mid-management staff members were promoted, based on their experience, knowledge and skills, to fill the vacated positions. The County budget

office did not permit the Clerk's Office to fill these positions until the current fiscal year.

Three of the five individuals that you named have over 25 years of experience at the Clerk's Office, one has almost 21 years, and the other one has almost 20 years. In fact, the individual who received the largest salary increase has worked in the Clerk's Office for close to 30 years. All of these employees were hired by one of Clerk Brown's predecessors, and they were promoted in consideration of their long lengths of qualified service, underscoring Clerk Brown's long-held "professionalism over politics" philosophy in managing the Clerk's Office. The salary increases the promoted individuals received reflect the higher level of responsibility of the senior management positions they assumed. However, none of them received the full salary of the previous job holder; therefore, the Clerk's Office was able to save some money with these promotions.

Mr. Slodysko also asked the following questions: "What is Dorothy Brown's policy on employees donating to her campaign fund? Do campaign donations play a factor in who get's [sic] promoted within the office? Were any of these employees promoted because they donated to Dorothy Brown's campaign fund?"

The Clerk's Office responded with this statement:

"On December 1, 2012, Hon. Dorothy Brown established a policy that she would not accept donations to her campaign fund from Clerk's Office employees. Research shows that the individuals you named made no contributions to Clerk Brown's campaign after the date of the no donations policy; and, prior to the policy, three had made minimal contributions and two had made no contributions ever. Research also found that the amounts the three contributing employees made to Clerk Brown's campaigns during the 12 years she accepted donations, averaged out to \$50.66, \$37.50 and \$16.00 per year, individually.

"As you can see, all the individuals you named are exceedingly qualified for their new positions, and there is no connection between the job promotions and Clerk Brown's campaign fund. "

The Clerk's Office amended a follow-up statement to Mr. Slodysko when further research found that one of the employee's contributions were accounted for under her husband's name, which appears first on their joint checking account: "Our further research found that four of these employees had contributed to Clerk Brown's campaigns sporadically over the 13 years and four months of her tenure, with their total contributions averaging out, annually, as \$15.38, \$34.62, \$46.77, and \$207.30 individually; and our research found no contributions to Clerk Brown's campaigns made by the employee who received the highest salary increase with the promotion."

After sending another follow-up question on April 2, 2014, Mr. Slodysko was asked to explain the story's angle. He replied, "No angle to it," and made no mention of his attempts to contact the employees directly. The three employees who did receive calls were alarmed and dismayed by the tenor of Mr. Slodysko's inquiries.

Accordingly, the Clerk's Office responded to Mr. Slodysko, with this statement:

"As you were previously informed, three of the recently promoted employees you inquired about have more than two decades of experience and two of them have almost 30 years of experience working in the Clerk's Office. All five of these employees were hired under a previous Clerk of Court administration; they began at entry level or near entry level positions and diligently worked

their way up the ladder, which is highly commendable on their part. Clerk Brown should also be applauded for recognizing employees who exhibit an excellent work ethic, and promoting them on that criterion.”

The Clerk’s Office, again, asked Mr. Slodysko what his story is basically about to ensure that the information from the Clerk’s Office sufficiently addressed the subject matter of the article. “Thereby,” the Clerk’s Office’s statement noted, “We can expect that our answers will be fairly and accurately reported.”

“It’s unfortunate that the Clerk’s Office is forced to defend its promotion of employees who have obviously earned their job advancements for no other reason than their records of decades of quality service in the workplace,” said Clerk Dorothy Brown. “It’s disheartening to think that one of the *Chicago Sun-Times*’ reporters appears to have no appreciation for the hard-working citizens of Cook County, and seems to want to besmirch the longstanding professional careers of some of them for no apparent reason other than the fact that they work for the Clerk of the Circuit Court.”

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