

Restore Integrity in Henry County

The meltdown that has taken place over the past few weeks in the County Attorney's Office leaves the citizens of Henry County with many questions. Controversy and chaos are not new to the office, but the latest developments certainly leave us with more questions than answers.

Throughout the past couple of years, it seems the County Attorney's office has been in conflict with local law enforcement. There have been headlines about the Brady-Giglio list placement, a court ruling from Judge Thomas Reidel stating the County Attorney had "abused his discretion" overturned the decision and ordered Deputy Lopez removed from the list. Deputy Lopez then asked for his attorney fees to be reimbursed due to being unjustly placed on the list by the County Attorney. The Supervisors have not yet made a final decision because the County Attorney advised against it. It's no wonder, since he was the originator of the placement.

Then there have been lawsuits and FOIA Requests. The latest FOIA requests have sought information about multiple departments, including IT, the County Attorney and members of his office and other elected officials. Is it coincidence that when the FOIA information was being prepared, the County Attorney resigned?

In an early January meeting, it was announced that Asst County Attorney Blake Vierra was leaving to join the Des Moines County Attorney's Office. During his last report at the Jan 8th Supervisor's Meeting, Mr. Vierra sought the Supervisor's approval for the new hire to fill his vacancy, Ms. Abbie Liechty. This was all news to the Supervisors. The job vacancy was apparently posted on the Courthouse Bulletin Board for a minimum number of days. In today's modern age, it seems a job of this stature should have been posted with a broader reach than one bulletin board, perhaps online where attorneys from all areas would have the opportunity to apply. Was this approach used to keep the pool of applicants small so that the County Attorney could hand select his successor? The other Attorney with tenure in the office lives outside the county making him ineligible for the position. Should an elected County Official that has been surrounded by controversy be able to hand select their successor, appoint them as a "Deputy County Attorney" and then conveniently resign from office only 3 weeks after they began employment with the county?

Once it was announced that Mr. Stater was resigning on February 3rd, Ms. Liechty emailed the Supervisors on February 5th and apologized that she hadn't met them yet in her 19 days of employment. She requested a meeting and stated the office would need a secretary. This looks like a presumption that business will continue as usual under her leadership. Ms. Liechty began her employment in the County Attorney's Office on January 12th. 17 working days prior to Mr. Stater resigning. Was this preplanned?

The concerns and questions do not stop there...

Is the public aware that the County Attorney's office doors were locked until members of the public complained last year?

Is the public aware that the County Attorney's office never attended Department Head meetings with the Supervisors until members of the public asked, "why not?"

Is the public aware that the County Attorney's Administrative Assistant, Ms. Cara Ferguson, also owns a home and lives with Mr. Stater? Ms. Ferguson also apparently resigned effective February 6th with no notice to the County.

Is the public aware that Ms. Liechty's father, Tim Liechty, is a Magistrate Judge in the 8th District, serving Henry County? Is this a conflict of interest?

Is the public aware that Ms. Liechty is also related to other parties that have made headlines in the County?

Is the public aware that Nicole Rose, Witness/Victim Coordinator in the County Attorney's office, testified on behalf of Mr. Stater in the Brady-Giglio hearing?

Is the public aware that at the February 5th Supervisors Meeting, Police Chief Lyle Murray spoke during public comment and stated his concerns with the office vacancy, stating pending cases, including crimes against children, that have been awaiting action from the County Attorney's Office for over 4 months?

So many questions, conflicts and an abundance of chaos make it crystal clear that now is the time for a fresh start in the County Attorney's Office. Continuing to do what we've always done will get us the same result. Turmoil, chaos and drama. Henry County needs a County Attorney who will be impartial. This means someone who is not related to others in the County or faced with past relationship issues, including nepotism within the office or the Courthouse. It is time for justice to prevail no matter who you are or who you are related to. Those who commit crimes must be held accountable. It is time for the County Attorney's Office to rebuild trust with law enforcement, the community and the victims that are counting on justice. The Interim Attorney will still need to run for the Office in the General Election, but we can't wait 10 months for this... We must have a County Attorney NOW who will start the rebuilding process. The County Board of Supervisors needs to appoint Becky Wilson as the Interim County Attorney. Any other candidate that is currently on the radar will bring more of the same and prolong the agony. The Restoration of Justice, Transparency and Integrity MUST begin NOW!!!

Respectfully,

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