

I am no longer the Finance Director of Leelanau County. I did not leave by choice, and I will explain my departure into the record myself rather than leave it to the Board's discretion.

In recent practice, Leelanau County has declined to release the outcomes of its investigations. Taxpayers fund the operations of this county, and they are entitled to see how it is run. Letters from departing Finance staff have repeatedly been dismissed as immaterial and treated with disdain. Staff who cared enough to put their concerns into writing deserve transparency and an honest internal review, not dismissal. This statement will not be set aside the way those letters were.

I ask that this public comment be entered into the record in full.

Members of the Board,

I moved my life from Grand Rapids to Traverse City to serve as Leelanau County's Assistant Finance Director. I took ownership of the Finance Department early, intending to build my career around its success, and I treated its successes as my own.

I reported inappropriate conduct by the former County Administrator to this Board. The law firm this Board hired concluded that he likely violated the law, and County counsel confirmed that my report was protected activity under the Michigan Whistleblowers' Protection Act. Everything I describe tonight happened after that report, and is directly related to it.

My complaint asked for the tools and support needed for this job. The previous County Administrator did not provide them, and the HR Manager has not. My concerns regarding the HR Manager remain unaddressed. Interim County Administrator Lauren Cypher has not been given the authority to support the Finance Department. Individual commissioners have proceeded on their own terms. Some have stepped back from their responsibilities, some have pursued personal grievances, and some have stood up for this department.

Since I filed my whistleblower complaint, the Board's actions have shown me where this department stands.

When I sent the complaint, I was scared. I sat in my office filled with fear. I left the building at the same time as my Account Clerk because I was scared to be alone with the former County Administrator. I was scared when elected officials wrote letters urging his reinstatement, and I was scared when a commissioner on this Board commented that he [Mr. Dyer] "got screwed." Commissioner Allgaier, you made that statement to the Leelanau Enterprise after the law firm this Board retained concluded that he likely violated the law. I reported him because it was the right thing to do. Your statement in support of him came after the report concluded that I was the victim.

This Board voted not to release the outcome of that investigation. It is public only because I made it. A board that wanted an independent Finance Department, let alone good leadership, would support the person who reported those violations. Instead, I have been treated as the problem and retaliated against repeatedly.

The retaliation was not a single incident or a difficult stretch. It was frequent, it was public, and it did not stop. My movements and leave were tracked. Conversations in my office were reported to commissioners. My workload increased while I was required to correct errors that were not my department's responsibility. My work was criticized in open session and in the press. I parked at different entrances to avoid being watched. I lost sleep over potential errors and how they might be used against me. My treatment changed remarkably once the former Administrator lost his authority, and each instance cost more than the last.

None of this happened without the County's knowledge. I reported it in writing to the County's attorneys as it occurred, and I have kept a record of each event.

My predecessor and I were both qualified for this role. We were both reminded, repeatedly, that we did not have the support of this campus, we were both regularly talked past in favor of whichever man was in the room. Two qualified women, and two departures. I ask the Board to sit with that pattern.

Chairman Yoder, you said nothing when I was criticized in public or when emails circulated with me as their subject. You continued to tell me to "hang in there". Encouragement offered in private does not help someone who is criticized in public.

Commissioner Allgaier, you told me you were disappointed in my unwillingness to change, and you stated publicly that I continue to provide incorrect information. Yet you have never met with me or asked me a question outside this room.

Commissioner Wessell, you have repeatedly expressed shame in my department and unfairly questioned my ability. You criticized me over even considering a fully qualified candidate, a former Finance Department employee, because of a letter she had written raising basically the same issues I did. You refused to rehire her and said she was "against us" when all she did was raise serious concerns about the former Administrator. You treated her different than you have a man in the same position. I wrote a letter much like hers. I am left to conclude you viewed me the same way based upon yours, and other's, actions.

Commissioner Robbins, you have unfairly itemized my errors in public in an effort to question my qualifications, and you have said you keep a book on me. You have made threatening statements about tracking other employees. Just before 5:00 p.m. on a Friday, I was asked to respond to an allegation you made to the media about my supposed unethical efforts to benefit my husband and me, statements that directly damages my personal and professional reputation. That allegation was the point at which I could no longer continue.

The public statements made about me and my work have damaged a professional reputation I worked hard to build, and they will follow me well beyond this building.

None of this conduct was hidden, and its outcome was predictable. No one should have to work under these conditions, and while I have tried I could not. I did not resign, I was forced out. I was left with no other option.

Commissioners, you now have a dismantled Finance Department, and you have a decision to make. If the Board does not want a Finance Department, it should take formal action to eliminate it. If you want to continue, then you owe this department and the citizens of this county the internal reflection. The letters left by departing staff, this statement and the formal investigations have given you everything you need to begin.

To the residents of Leelanau County: the money this Board oversees is yours. Every person at this table was elected by you. I can no longer assure accountability for your tax dollars, and I am concerned the county will return to where it stood before my complaint. Not in the good shape Cathy Hartesvelt left it, but as it was under the two men who followed.