



Angelina “Angel” Colonnese

CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT AND COMPTROLLER OF MANATEE COUNTY

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May 20, 2022

Commissioner Kevin Van Ostenbridge, Board Chair
Manatee County Government
P.O. Box 1000
Bradenton, Florida 34206

Dear Commissioner Van Ostenbridge,

I am writing to you today regarding repeated troubling events that continue to happen involving your county administrator of which you may not be aware. It has become such a concern that it is necessary and my duty as the Clerk and Comptroller to memorialize these issues and bring them to your attention. It has become so prevalent that it became necessary for me to monitor the situation. When I recently received the agenda for your board meeting next week I accelerated this notice to you so that you would be fully informed. It would be unconscionable for me not to inform you of these matters in light of your upcoming agenda. I have grave concerns on the efficient operation and transparency in government to our citizens. Given my observations, these matters and those yet to be discovered, could create a significant cost to the taxpayers that are unquantifiable at this time. The following is a list of events that have transpired over the last several months. I have also referred some of these matters to my Inspector General.

- **Lack of Communication:** Strong communication between a county administrator and clerk is common statewide and necessary given our inextricably intertwined duties and responsibilities. With your current administrator however, communication has been very limited.

My office interacts on day to day business with the county and on multiple levels of shared technology and projects. Over the past year we have experienced a significant disconnect in communication and a delay in the knowledge of new projects initiated by the county until some of these projects are near completion. It is a common best practice to include all stakeholders in the discovery phase of a project in order to successfully implement change. There has been minimal coordination with my office from the county on multiple projects initiated at the administrator’s direction. Some examples include: Kronos Timekeeping System, Onbase Data Migration project, Onbase upgrades, E Travel Project, E-Agenda/E-minutes. I have independent constitutional authority over certain aspects of county operations, finance being a crucial part. This lack of communication has resulted in numerous delays and inefficiencies which is wasteful of taxpayer resources.

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- **Lack of Transparency:** Recent matters that have come to my attention, including my own experience with your county administrator, have given me significant concern for transparency. In a recent verbal exchange that I had with your administrator he admonished me for my promptness in responding to a public records request and stated that I need to “coordinate with him” before I respond to a public records request. He explained that he was having a “situation” in a department and that I, “released a public record, without telling him.” He went on to tell me that in doing so, I “could have brought down an entire county department.” I told him none of this had anything to do with a lawful public records request. I also reminded him that the record in question was a record of *my* office, not a county record.

My office has since learned of what appears to be serious issues with how the county handles public records requests and I have turned my concerns over to the Inspector General Division.

- **Reorganization Impacts and Potential Risks:** Some reorganizing is to be expected at the change of management. Recently, the reorganization by this county administrator has been taking place at an unprecedented rate. Changes in processes and reporting structures can create significant risks with respect to internal controls, such as segregation of duties. It can impact the culture of the workplace by creating uncertainty among staff and management. There are perpetual staff transfers taking place throughout the organization. In governmental accounting, the accounting structure is established and maintained in accordance with Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP). It is not as simple as hitting a button or copying and pasting. There are legitimate business practices that must be followed in order to properly account for expenditures. Our office produces the annual financial reports for the county and we are externally audited every year. As a result, we are required to comply with governmental accounting standards as referenced in the Statutes and set by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). My team has been working well with the county team on a plan which becomes hindered when the administrator becomes involved in the “weeds” and disrupts the process. This has created inefficiencies along with chaos and confusion.

Fiscal Accountability: 1) Recently, my office became aware that the county administrator instructed a county employee to call Voya, our deferred compensation provider, and request that an account be opened for Deputy County Administrator Reinshuttle. The intent was to provide a separate retirement account to mirror an FRS retirement account with the county making similar contributions to such an account for Reinshuttle. Apparently, Mr. Reinshuttle had previously retired with FRS benefits and is ineligible for an FRS retirement account. I advised my staff that this is a *policy* matter for the board to decide. Without board authorization we will not be making any such payments.

2) It also came to my attention that a \$46,000.00 Chevrolet Tahoe was purchased recently and while it is labeled a “pool” vehicle, there is evidence that the county administrator exclusively uses this vehicle as transportation including to and from work. This is in addition to his \$450.00 per month car allowance included in his pay as stipulated in his contract. This may be an item that you were not aware of but may want to consider since the vehicle was purchased subsequent to his contract. In light of the recent increase in the cost of fuel, I would suggest taking a look at this item. Most importantly there are also tax ramifications for such use of a county vehicle.

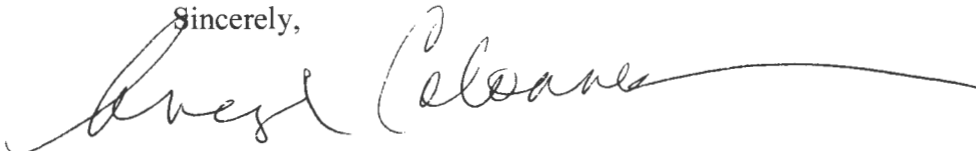
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3) Changing the fixed assets disposals – surplus assets were previously routinely approved monthly by the board. The decision was made to change this action to quarterly without any collaboration from the Clerk’s office. This change has significant impacts to both our fixed asset inventory control process as well as year-end financial statement implications that could impact our external audit.

This is not a complete account of all concerning activity that has transpired. The actions of your administrator hinder my constitutional duties as clerk to the board, accountant, auditor and custodian of all county funds. Communication, transparency, and fiscal accountability is of upmost importance, and I cannot underscore enough my concerns regarding the prospect of expending taxpayer dollars and public resources unnecessarily. As your clerk, I’m compelled to share my concerns with the board as it is my duty to make you aware of these matters. My office and I are willing to sit down with you to assist in order to rectify these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Angel", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Angel

cc: Commissioner James Satcher
Commissioner Reggie Bellamy
Commissioner Misty Servia
Commissioner Vanessa Baugh
Commissioner Carol Whitmore
Commissioner George Kruse
William Robinson, Esq.