



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0990-2003, **Version:** *

Res. No. 990

Resolution calling upon the City Council to condemn the City Board of Elections for its lenient reprimand of a Board employee who used blatant racial/gender slurs to describe another Board employee, and calling upon the appropriate committee of the Council to conduct an oversight hearing to address such event and examine sensitivity training at the Board regarding race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age discrimination.

By Council Members López, Barron, Boyland, Clarke, Comrie, Foster, Gerson, Koppell, Quinn, Reed, Seabrook, Vann and Weprin

Whereas, The City Board of Elections (the "Board") is responsible for administering all elections in the City of New York, certifying all election results and, most importantly, ensuring non-discriminatory access to the ballot box for all citizens to exercise their fundamental right to vote; and

Whereas, New York City has had an extremely troubling voting-rights history requiring three of its five counties to be subject to preclearance under the Voting Rights Act due to historical discrimination against African-American and Latino and other minority voters; and

Whereas, Pamela Green Perkins has given years of dedicated and loyal service to the City Board of Elections; and

Whereas, Pamela Green Perkins is the first African-American to have risen through the Board's ranks to become the first African-American senior executive at the Board; and

Whereas, Jerry Vedral, a Board clerk, on July 18, 2003, as recounted in a Board memorandum by one of his supervisors, in a particularly repugnant act of racism and sexism, screamed racial and gender aspersions about Ms. Perkins, and, within the same sentence, questioned Ms. Perkins' capability and integrity based solely on her race and gender; and

Whereas, This was not the first attack on Ms. Perkins' character, but simply the latest of other race and gender-based attacks since the commencement of her employment; and

Whereas, The Board has never been able to uncover an assailant until now; and

Whereas, After this most recent attack, former Executive Director, Daniel DeFrancesco, sent a letter to the Board praising Jerry Vedral's employment, although denouncing his remarks; and

Whereas, Moreover, after a hearing on the issue, the Board commissioners voted on August 4, 2003 to suspend Vedral for two weeks and transfer him to the Queens election office, while the victim of his attack called for his dismissal; and

Whereas, This pattern of leniency regarding Vedral's documented comments shocks the conscience; and

Whereas, The response by the Board was wholly disproportionate and inappropriate; and

Whereas, The Board had an opportunity to vindicate one of their champions of voting rights for the poor and disenfranchised, however, with such decision they have clearly squandered such opportunity; and

Whereas, The kind of psychological abuse at issue harkens back to an era when blacks and women and other minorities had no rights under the eyes of the law; and

Whereas, Such kinds of attacks do persist today and the intent of such attackers, although thankfully unsuccessful in this situation, is to steal the dignity, merit and resolve from their victims; and

Whereas, Ms. Perkins must now deal with the hurt, rage and suffering that accompany such an attack, today and countless days into the foreseeable future; and

Whereas, Such attacks, although never tolerable, are particularly troubling when they exist at a board or agency that deals with the voting process, the highest expression of freedom and democracy; and

Whereas, A body that protects every citizen's right to vote should embody our principles of democracy and liberty, and should stand as an example of inclusion and sorority and fraternity; and

Whereas, When such a body does not respond appropriately to blatant and injurious racism, it sends a message that such behavior is acceptable and not a serious issue; and

Whereas, The Board should not tolerate such behavior, should punish such behavior quickly and appropriately, should not countenance hate and vitriol, and should denounce all forms of racism, sexism and any and all bias toward ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and age; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York condemns the City Board of Elections for its lenient reprimand of a Board employee who used blatant racial/gender slurs to describe another Board employee, and calls upon the appropriate committee of the Council to conduct an oversight hearing to address such event and examine sensitivity training at the Board regarding race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability and age discrimination.

LS# 2966
8/18/03
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