Thabisa Rich

February 22, 2024

Thabisa:

This formal correspondence shall serve as an official Letter of Reprimand. This letter, coaching statement and performance improvement steps are being tendered to you for violations of the City’s Code of Conduct, Ord. 12 5/8-4, if not the letter of the law, the spirit in which the Code of Conduct was intended.

The City’s Code of Conduct clearly states that,

1. Public officials and municipal employees shall refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or affronts upon the character, motives, or intents of other public officials or municipal employees, or of members of the public.

2. Public officials and municipal employees shall represent the policies and positions of the city government to the best of their abilities when designated as delegates for such purpose. When representing their own individual opinions or personal positions, public officials and municipal employees shall state explicitly that the opinions or positions are their own and not the opinion or position of the city or of any administrative or other body within the city government and shall not cause or allow such an inference to occur.

We are outlining in the attached coaching statement your recent behavior that has violated the City’s code of conduct. Such conduct tarnishes the reputation of the City and undermines the trust and confidence that the public places in us as representatives of their government.

It is imperative that you understand the seriousness of these violations and the potential consequences of such actions. Therefore, we expect an immediate correction in your behavior and a commitment to upholding the standards outlined in the City’s Code of Conduct.
Going forward, please ensure that you exercise professionalism, respect, and discretion in all your interactions with members of the New Haven community while in your official duties with the City or while on your own personal time. Negative interactions with the public can lead to workplace impacts. Failure to do so may result in further disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Therefore, you are directed to undertake the following corrective actions:

1. You will have the attached letter of reprimand and the attached coaching statement placed in your personnel file.
2. You will read and sign the City's Code of Conduct.
3. You will attend cultural sensitivity training during your normal scheduled work hours. The training will be determined by Human Resources in consultation with your supervisor.

Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sean Matteson
Chief of Staff

Cc: Michael Piscitelli, EDA
    Adriane Jefferson, Cultural Affairs
    Wendella Battey, Labor Relations
    Marcella Garcia, Human Resources
    Gilda Herrea, President Local 3144
CITY OF NEW HAVEN

Standards of Conduct Acknowledgement Form
New Haven, CT Code of Ordinances

Sec. 12%-4. - Standards of Conduct; Per City of New Haven Code of Ordinances
a) A public official or municipal employee who has a conflict of interest in a matter affecting the city shall refrain from taking any action on or in the matter.

b) The professional and personal conduct of public officials and municipal employees shall avoid impropriety and even the appearance of impropriety.

c) Public officials and municipal employees shall refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or affronts upon the character, motives, or intents of other public officials or municipal employees, or of members of the public.

d) Public officials and municipal employees shall not give no special treatment or consideration to any person or group beyond that which is available to any other person or group.

e) Recognizing the value of boards, and commissions, and task forces in the public policy decision-making process, public officials and municipal employees shall refrain from using their public positions to improperly influence the proceedings, deliberations, decisions, actions, or administration of any board, commission, or task force.

f) Public officials and municipal employees shall represent the policies and positions of the city government to the best of their abilities when designated as delegates for such purpose. When representing their own individual opinions or personal positions, public officials and municipal employees shall state explicitly that the opinions or positions are their own and not the opinion or position of the city or of any administrative or other body within the city government and shall not cause or allow such an inference to occur.

g) Public officials and municipal employees shall avoid any action or activity that constitutes or gives rise to a conflict of interest.

h) Public officials shall not interfere or seek to interfere with the duties or responsibilities of other public officials or municipal employees over whom they do not have supervisory authority and responsibility.

i) Public officials shall support and contribute to the maintenance of a positive and constructive workplace environment. Recognizing their special role in the public trust, public officials shall refrain from inappropriate action toward other public officials, municipal employees, or members of the public.

(Ord. No. 1561, 12-17-07)

Employee Acknowledgement

I have reviewed and understand New Haven's Standards of Conduct as enacted in the City's Code of Ordinances. I also understand that these Standards of Conduct will apply to me as an employee of the City of New Haven and that any violation of these Standards of Conduct, and future revisions to it, may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination from employment.

Thabisa Rich

Print Name

T.F. Rich

Employee Signature

Cultural Affairs

Department

2/29/2024

Date

06-2023 (rev 07-2023)
**Counseling Discussion Plan for:** Thabisa Rich ("Employee") represented by AFSCME Local 3144. The Employee serves as the Community Engagement Liaison for the Office of Cultural Affairs, and Adriane Jefferson, the Director, is her supervisor.

**Date:** 20 FEB 2024

**Describe the behavior that caused the need for this counseling session.**

On February 11, 2024, the Employee, a Community Engagement Coordinator for the Cultural Affairs Department of the City of New Haven, participated in a single person demonstration on Knollwood Street in the City of New Haven on the topic of the conflict in Israel and Gaza. In the protest, the Employee, via an electronic megaphone, chanted pro-Palestinian slogans including in front of the home of a resident because they had a sign in their yard supporting the State of Israel. It is noted that the Employee did not engage in the protest during the course of her regular work hours with the City.

Additionally, the Employee posted several statements publicly on Facebook that may be considered anti-Semitic. For example, the employee wrote "I'm sick of these Jew focused ads." and "We have been witnessing Jewish folks inciting hate." and "I promise I understand that some of ya'll have your pockets lined with bosses who are Jewish." These social media posts on Facebook were widely seen and shared on local and national media. It is also noted that, to our knowledge, the employee did not generate these social media posts during the course of her normal work schedule with the City, or in her official capacity.

**Describe the outcome or result of this behavior (ie, how productivity is affected; work impacted; employees affected, etc.)**

The City of New Haven recognizes that there are strong and deep feelings on both sides of the Israel and Gaza issue – amongst residents and City employees alike. Since the beginning of the Israel and Gaza crisis in October of 2023, there have been multiple demonstrations held across New Haven. Some City employees on their own personal time have participated in these demonstrations. These demonstrations have been peaceful and have not targeted any specific religious or ethnic group.

The Employee, whether intentionally or unintentionally, has made social media posts that a reasonable person could find to be not only offensive, but antisemitic in nature. Additionally, the act of an individual, pro-Palestinian protest only feet from the front door of a private Jewish families’ residence elicited angst, anger and fear by some in the city.

The Employee’s behavior and choices were made publicly and have now been widely publicized in the media. The Employee serves as the Community Engagement Coordinator for the Cultural Affairs Department of the City. The Position was created to be, "...responsible for providing professional assistance to community, municipal, and regional groups and organizations." Further the position requires that the Employee, "...be able
to work with a wide spectrum of individuals and groups. " The Employee’s public actions have impaired her ability to perform this work effectively. She has done significant damage to her professional reputation and ability to work with a wide spectrum of individuals and groups in the city.

Additionally, the City workforce is a very diverse group of employees religiously, racially, ethnically and gender identity. The language choices made by the Employee at her protest and in social media posts could alienate the Employee from co-workers and have a detrimental effect in both interdepartmental support and employee esprit de corps.

Describe the desired behavior.

The Employee exercised poor judgement in her language choice and in the time, place and manner in which she expressed her views. The Employee could have and in the future may:

a. Participate in protests that refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or affronts upon the character, motives, or intents of other public officials or municipal employees, or of members of the public.

b. Advocate her position on matters of public concern without making statements targeting an entire religion or race (“Jew” or “Jewish”).

c. Make social media posts without targeting an entire religion or race.

d. When advocating her personal opinion, state explicitly that the opinions or positions are her own and not the opinion or position of the city or of any administrative or other body within the city government.

e. Make choices that deepen her ties to the New Haven community, rather than create divides with residents.

Recommendations to improve Employee performance. (Describe any assistance needed to improve.)

The Employee will have the attached letter of reprimand and this coaching statement placed in her personnel.

The Employee, as a part of her onboarding process, has already signed a statement acknowledging she has read and will abide by the City’s Code of Conduct and ethical standards. The employee will be required to reread and sign the City’s Code of Conduct. A copy of that acknowledgement will be included in her personal file permanently.

The Employee will attend cultural sensitivity training during her normally scheduled work hours. The training will be determined by Human Resources in consultation with the Employee’s supervisor.
If the Employee is amenable to a mediated meeting with the resident(s) that was the subject of the protest on February 11, 2024, the City will make all best efforts to bring parties together.

The City appreciates that the employee has removed the offensive posts from her Facebook page. Should the Employee continue to make offensive social media posts or continue to target individual residents for protests at their homes, the City may seek discipline up to and including termination.

**Employee Comments:**

I regret having to make additional corrections, but it is necessary to present the truth. Therefore, I would like to offer clarification to ensure that this letter accurately reflects the events of February 11, 2024:

- On the day in question, I posted a message on my social media announcing my participation in a solo demonstration within my neighborhood inviting the community to take part in support of the ceasefire resolution. It's important to note that I did not target any individual or private residence; rather, I walked along my street until I was confronted by a neighbor.

- Furthermore, it is crucial to correct the statement that suggests I was mere feet from a neighbor's front door. Throughout the demonstration, I remained on the street, maintaining a respectful distance. Additionally, I was subjected to racial and xenophobic slurs by a rabbi and was told by some neighbors to "get off my street."

- I must object to the assertion that the demonstration was held at an inappropriate time or place. It took place within my neighborhood on a Sunday during non-work hours.

- Regarding my statements on social media, it's important to clarify that they were taken out of context. The phrases used were never intended to harm or diminish an entire community; rather, they aimed to shed light on the propaganda and misinformation surrounding the true impact of the conflict on the people of Palestine.

- Furthermore, I acknowledge that my intentions did not fully achieve the intended impact, which was to advocate for humanity, remind our community at large of our collective voice, and hold our elected leaders accountable by calling for a ceasefire. It's essential that our elected representatives reflect our values.

- As of the Code of Conduct, I am pleased to see the copy and now have full knowledge of its contents as well as being aware of my rights as a private citizen and will continue to find the balance that is to lead with care and caution.

- Lastly, I want to emphasize my track record since joining the City. I have consistently demonstrated competence, care, and fairness. I am dedicated to our mission of serving all communities and upholding the Department's Cultural Equity Plan, ensuring that every New Havener is seen, heard, and supported without exception. I take pride in serving my community and am fully capable and willing to continue in my role, honored to represent and work on behalf of my community.

- With regards to my job title, it should be consistently referred to as "Community Outreach Coordinator" throughout this correspondence.

I hope these points help to clarify the situation more accurately.