



Vermont State Employees' Association

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Dear Commissioner Harrington:

Having reviewed your testimony to the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development about the alarming number of vacant positions in your Department (54 vacant positions, a vacancy rate of 20%), one of two things could be true; either you testified before the Committee without a clear understanding of the contract that Governor Scott signed with the VSEA that you have been working under for the past five years, or you *did* know about the contractual tools available to you to improve recruitment and retention and you chose instead to mislead the Committee. I am not sure which possibility is more problematic.

I am heartened to hear that you find allegations of retaliation against members of your staff at the Department of Labor “extremely unsettling.” One might be forgiven for thinking that you considered it an inconsequential matter given that you claimed— in your letter dated March 1, 2024— that VSEA has inadequately communicated these pervasive issues to the Administration. This allegation is curious given that:

- In May of last year, a complaint of harassment, discrimination, retaliation, and hostility on the part of DOL management was submitted by VSEA to the Department of Human Resources
- On March of last year, a complaint about “hostility” and “poor and unprofessional treatment” by DOL management was submitted on behalf of another member of ours.

I also appreciate your concern for VSEA’s suitability to the task of safeguarding our members’ rights. In this spirit of constructive criticism, allow me to offer you some advice in the same vein:

- In addressing toxic, retaliatory workplace cultures perpetuated by management, it is essential to understand retaliatory action has a chilling effect on vulnerable employees’ willingness to come forward to report such behavior. The number of members willing to come forward with their stories of retaliation—*despite* such a culture— will, necessarily represent the proverbial “tip of the iceberg.” A change in culture on this issue must begin at the top.
- Given your concern for the internal workings of VSEA, I encourage you to collaborate more regularly with your colleagues in the Department of Human Resources— I’m sure that they could bring the complaints listed above, and others, to your attention.

Finally, given the lack of success our formal complaints have had in addressing the culture of the Department of Labor— and despite your understandable concern about VSEA making the Legislature aware of the Administration’s repeated failures in this regard— VSEA will never apologize for using any and all means at our disposal in our full-throated advocacy for our members. We believe they have the right to work in a department free of retaliation and hostility. We are happy to hear that you now share this goal, and stand at the ready to collaborate with you to make this dream a reality.

Cordially,



Steve Howard
Executive Director, Vermont State Employees’ Association

CC: The House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
Kristin Clouser, Secretary of Administration