

Date of Submission: December 6, 2021

Submitted by: Dr. Stephanie Kang, Bureau Director, Health Equity

Date of incident: Monday, November 29, 2021

Description: At approximately 2:00 pm, I entered Brian Todd's office and asked if we could speak. I sat down and said that I wanted to apologize that he was not looped in properly for a statement that was written the week prior. He replied with "It's fine, it's not a big deal." and he noted Dr Wright had relayed to him as well that he recognized Brian should have been looped into the process. Brian then said "When I saw the health announcement I didn't expect there would be such a public response." I said, "Oh? Hearing that actually makes me feel better". I told him that I understood that the statement caused some pushback but that there were also many positive comments that we received and I wanted to make sure they were also recognized. I handed him a single white paper that consisted of collected comments from MPHD employees regarding the statement. He looked at it, said, "okay", and put it down on his desk.

Then, Brian mentioned that we still needed to set a time for the interview with Brett Kelman from the Tennessean (this was an interview that we had tried to set multiple times in the previous months but had been unable to pin down a date). He then called Brett, asked him for a time that he was available. Brett mentioned that 2:00 pm on Thursday, December 2nd, worked for him. I pulled out my phone to look at my calendar and asked if we could do 2:30 pm instead. Brett and Brian confirmed that time worked then Brian hung up the phone. Brian then said he would send me and Tené Franklin a calendar invite for the interview. I then made a comment about how nice the leather folder he had on his desk was and asked if he had made it himself. He laughed and said no, his wife gave it to him as a gift. He had a similar one for many years but it had become very tattered, so after his wife saw him holding it on TV during press conferences, she gifted him a new one.

Then I thanked him again for his time and asked if we could discuss one more item. I referenced the document of comments I handed to him and said that I would appreciate hearing his feedback about what the process for future similar statements should look like and what were his suggestions for making that process smooth and what suggestions did he have for language or approach to make an effective statement. He stated that he loves public health but that he was paid to do a specific job, and everyone else who shows at MPHD to work are paid to do a job, and that he did not believe it was his job at MPHD to focus on these issues and that he did not believe it was relevant to public health. He referenced that to him, his greatest concern was why immunization rates for children were dropping, and asked me what this statement does to help that. He also noted that the event related to the statement was in a different state and questioned why it should be a concern for those in Tennessee. I said that while an issue may not impact him, it doesn't mean it isn't relevant or impact other people at the department and that ensuring the well-being of our workforce is critical to delivering public health services. He noted that public health wasn't what it used to be and said the department was changing too fast. He also said that the department wasn't the department he used to know and that it might

be time to retire because he “didn’t care about these issues.” I said “I’m really sad to hear that, Brian, because your work is so important to the department.” He replied sarcastically, “we’ll I’m sorry you’re sad” as he shrugged. He then brought up the purpose of the board chair. He noted “Board chairs are not supposed to be involved with the day to day operations...But it seems that Tené Franklin is very involved with the day-to-day operations of the Bureau of Health Equity.” I noted that I had not conversed about the Bureau’s work with Tené in a few weeks and that this was not accurate. I clearly re-stated that Tené is not involved in the day to day with the Health Equity team. He said, “oh yeah? Then why was she here just last week at Lentz.” I responded that it was not to meet with me.

He then said “Well, I still don’t understand why we made that statement in the first place. It seems that someone from your team just got upset so you sent that.” I responded “No, that’s not true. Several people across the department came to me or my team personally sharing their concerns and asking if leadership would be responding, which is what prompted the statement draft”. I picked up the document I handed earlier and re-noted what the statement meant to people I had heard from. As I showed him the paper, he read it, laughed, pointed at the middle of the page and said “Well of course Heather said something.” I responded “I’m not sure what that means but her comment should still be valued.” I then pointed to the top of the paper where several anonymous comments were listed. He laughed again, and said “Why are they anonymous? Who are they?”. I said “People did not feel comfortable sharing their name, so we gave them the option of being anonymous.” He pressed me again “But who are they? I responded, “I am not comfortable sharing who they are.” He said, “Well, I’ve never heard anyone say anything like this. Why aren’t they comfortable talking to me then?” I responded that “Well, it’s not always easy to talk to a white man in leadership about race issues”. Brian then stood up very fast. When he started to scream, his hands flew up above his head, flinging the leather folder onto the desk. When the folder hit the table, it made a very loud noise that made my body jump but I couldn’t voluntarily move. My eyes were very wide and my hands gripped the chair very hard as my heart beat very fast. I leaned back when he got closer to me and stood over me and continued to yell. He screamed loudly “That’s it, this conversation is over, get out of my office!” He then stormed towards me, his face very red, hands still raised, standing very closely to me screaming, “You are going to accuse me of being a white man in leadership? This is over, get out!” and continued screaming this over and over. I remained sitting in shock feeling confused, intimidated and scared as he stood over me and watched him swing open the door of his office and walk out continuing to scream. After a couple of moments, I followed him as I could hear that he was screaming about me. I passed by Matt Peters, who was sitting in his office and stood near Brian, who was screaming in the doorway of Dr. Wright’s office. (I distinctly remember seeing LaDonna Ivey and am almost certain Martha Bickley was also present). Brian continued to scream about me. I stood behind Brian saying “I’m very confused, I did not mean anything offensive, this is being taken out of context” while he was yelling “I will not deal with her telling me that I am a white man in leadership, she is bringing race politics into this place and I will not be a part of it! I am done, I am done!”. He then left the office.

After he stormed out, I was in complete shock. I remember feeling my heart pounding in my chest. I looked into Dr. Wright's office to see he had been in the middle of a meeting with Dr. Black. He asked me to come into the office and close the door. I entered Dr. Wright's office completely in shock, scared, and confused about what had just happened. I couldn't feel my hands and could barely speak. When Dr. Wright and Black asked me if I was okay, I couldn't pull my words together. I had to take a few deep breaths and tried to explain but my thoughts were racing. I felt so embarrassed and I couldn't get my heart rate to slow down. I uttered a few words to try to explain that I had gone into Brian's office to offer an apology and that I was completely confused as to what had just transpired. I was in a daze and tried to explain what had just happened but I was too frazzled to explain the story coherently. After a little longer, I spoke with Dr. Wright and Dr. Black through heavy breaths. I said, "I had gone to Brian to apologize about the process from last week. I didn't mean anything, I don't understand what happened. I'm so confused." I then restated a few of the sentences that were exchanged with Brian.

After speaking with them I walked out to my office, still in shock. As I walked towards my office, I saw my phone and noted it was a little before 2:40 pm. I saw Anthony Johnson and I said to him "Oh my God, I don't know what just happened but Brian was just screaming at me. We need to talk" As I continued walking down the hallway, I motioned to the rest of my team, Raquel de la Huerga, and Timothy McDaniel to join me inside my office. They sat down and I couldn't speak. I finally said "the craziest thing just happened" but then was silent for a while longer as I was still processing the interaction I had with Brian. I remember tears starting to come to my eyes but I didn't want to cry in front of my team so I took several breaths to slow down the urge to cry. Then I started to explain what happened, line by line of the conversation I had with Brian and then his reaction. My team told me that they were so sorry this happened and that I needed to file an HR complaint right away. One team member noted that "You were verbally assaulted and intimidated by Brian. This is not okay for him to act like this, especially in a work setting." I told them that I was still processing everything that had happened and I would need time to think about what to do. I told them I didn't want to cause more issues at the department and didn't know how Brian would retaliate if I submit a complaint. I told them I would let them know what I decided and told them to go back to their desks. After they left, I cried for a few moments, then got back to work.

Additional comments:

In my entire professional career, I have never experienced acts of aggression, especially of this level, near or at me. Every day since November 29, 2021, I have experienced anxiety when thinking of this incident and what this means for our work moving forward. Anxiety that my team will be affected by this situation. Anxiety that Brian will be able to scream at me again without any consequences. I have never experienced anything remotely like this my entire professional career. I have never been spoken to this way, I have never been screamed at or intimidated, or made to feel I should be scared in my workplace. It has taken me several days to process everything that happened during this incident and I feel incredibly vulnerable to have to share how this incident made me feel and continues to impact me.

Furthermore, this has greatly impacted my ability to get work completed or conducted appropriately. On December 2, 2021, I had an interview with a well-known local newspaper scheduled with Brett Kelman and Tene Franklin that Brian organized. Brian has attended all my previous sessions and interviews with reporters. I needed to get more information and preparation from Brian about the interview but did not due to fear that I will be screamed at again. I also have other work priorities that are related to the communications team and have been unable to work on them as I am uncomfortable speaking to Brian unless someone else is present. For the interview with Brett, I was okay proceeding since I knew others would be present. Brian escorted Brett to the room where the interview was going to be conducted, and then he said "okay, you're all set, I'm going to go" and turned around and left. Brian has previously told me explicitly that interviews with the press must be conducted with a member of the communications team present. But for the first time since I started, he did not ensure that either he or another person from communications was there to appropriately monitor the interview. Clearly, my work is being impacted by this situation as Brian is unwilling to fulfill communication responsibilities for assignments related to the Bureau of Health Equity and this has further added to my anxiety and fear of working with Brian.