

Incident Report: December 18 Elevator Confrontation

On Wednesday, December 18, I witnessed one of the most unprofessional displays I've ever experienced at Akron Public Schools by Dr. Stacey Hodoh, the district's Director of Communication.

Sequence of Events:

After exiting an executive session, I walked to the elevator with Members Sykes, Jackson, and Harrison. The media, aware of the meeting's significance that evening, was stationed downstairs. When the elevator doors opened, a woman dressed in casual attire stood inside, holding a phone and silently staring at us. Given the security protocols for executive-level floors and the unusual circumstances, including a recent incident with media at the elevators, I hesitated before getting on the elevator, unsure of her identity. The elevator quickly became crowded as additional board members joined. Member Harrison, the last to enter, faced the woman as the doors closed behind him.

At that moment, the woman looked at Member Harrison and told him not to look at her. Given the confined space and audience, this was very surprising. Harrison, seemed equally taken aback, and asked if he knew her. At this point I was especially confused because there were 4 board members in the elevator.

If someone were coming from the executive floor, at least one of us should likely recognize her, and she should certainly know at least one of us. It was after 8 p.m., and anyone whose role requires them to be on the executive floor at that hour should be familiar with their board members. As board members, we not only play a key role in shaping the district's direction and ensuring accountability, but in this particular instance, we were gathered after 8 p.m. on the Wednesday before Christmas to address a highly sensitive leadership issue—one that everyone in the building knew would have a significant impact on them.

She responded sharply, claiming, "You know who I am." Harrison, sounding confused, replied that he did not. She repeated her statement in a louder, assertive, almost hostile tone, saying again, "You know who I am." Harrison chuckled awkwardly and reiterated that he didn't know her.

The situation escalated as the woman began issuing threats, including claims that Harrison would be "put up on posters". Her tone became increasingly aggressive, and the proximity in the confined space required me to shift my position in the elevator out of concern for safety. As the elevator doors opened, her behavior became more erratic and disruptive. I exited promptly to avoid further escalation. While Harrison and Jackson headed to the boardroom, Member Sykes attempted to calm Hodoh.

Despite Member Sykes' advice, Hodoh continued shouting nonsensical and inflammatory remarks like that she was only there to get her phone and that Harrison had threatened her, but

no one there was engaging with her- so who was she shouting to? It was like she was trying to draw attention to herself and make it sound like imaginary people were somehow agreeing with her near the media-filled boardroom. Security ultimately became involved. It was only then that I realized the woman causing a scene was Director of Communication, Stacey Hodoh.

I spoke with the board President (Autry) the first chance I got when the meeting concluded as we walked to our cars about this incident because I was concerned immediate action needed to occur. I also shared my experience with Attorney Fiedl the next day because I was concerned about potential legal complications when there are incidents.

Concerns:

Policy 4362.01 (Threatening Behavior) states: Threatening behavior consisting of any words or deeds that intimidate a staff member or cause anxiety concerning his/her physical well-being is strictly forbidden.

Additionally, the role of Director of Communication demands exceptional professionalism, emotional intelligence, and conflict-resolution skills—qualities entirely absent in this interaction. Her confrontational behavior in the presence of board members and near media representatives was not only unprofessional but also potentially in conflict with her job duties.

Key concerns include:

1. **Hostile Behavior:** Hodoh's aggressive tone, personal threats, and erratic remarks created an unsafe environment for board members and staff.
2. **Reputational Risk:** The incident occurred during a critical moment, with media awaiting updates on a sensitive district matter.
3. **Leadership Conduct:** Such behavior is unacceptable for someone in a senior leadership role, particularly one tasked with managing communication and representing the district.
4. **Policy Violations:** Threats and intimidation constitute workplace harassment, warranting immediate review under district conduct policies.

Recommended Actions:

I recognize that typical governance protocol should involve direct supervisors before calling an executive session. However, the superintendent is currently also under investigation, the director of HC has resigned, and the Labor Relations Manager has already asked to outsource this particular matter because these involve another board member and the board president.

To address the severity of this incident, I recommend the following steps:

1. **Conduct a Formal Investigation:** Gather statements from involved board members, staff, and security personnel to ensure an objective assessment.

Additional Consideration for Investigation:

It is important to note that Tod Wammes, Labor Relations Manager, has already requested that Stacey Hodoh be included in the current investigation of administration. Given her actions in the short time since she has been employed, I strongly recommend that the scope of this investigation explicitly include relevant policies and an assessment of her fitness for the role of Director of Communication. This assessment should consider both her behavior in the December 18 incident and her December 29 social media activity.

2. **Review Security Footage:** Analyze footage from the elevator and surrounding areas to determine the circumstances of her presence and actions.
3. **Assess Role Alignment:** Evaluate whether Hodoh's behavior aligns with the expectations and demands of her role.
4. **Reinforce Conduct Standards:** Reiterate workplace conduct policies, particularly for leadership positions, to uphold a professional and safe environment.
5. **Temporary Measures:** Consider limiting Hodoh's presence around board members until the investigation concludes to prevent further disruption.

It is our responsibility to address this matter proactively.

Respectfully,

Rene