[redacted]@[redacted].[redacted]

From: [redacted]@[redacted].[redacted]
Sent: Friday, October 14, 2022 11:11 PM
To: 'jonathan.dach@ct.gov'
Subject: Dawn Parker - UniteCT information
Attachments: Dismissal Letter_D. Parker.pdf

Hi Jonny,

I am unsure if you and the OFG are aware that I was dismissed of my role as the Director UniteCT on Tuesday, October 11th. I attached the letter here so you can see the way that it has been presented. I'm reaching out because this news came as shocking surprise to me, everyone at the Department, the UniteCT staff and all partners. The decision was made solely by Commissioner Bruno and Deputy Commissioner Hanks with no regard to an appropriate plan leaving staff overwhelmed and under supported at this current time. With the amount of work needed I anticipated leading UniteCT through 2025, and longer if the $60million or $220million re-allocation requests from ERA II come through, this decision is detrimental to the program.

UniteCT is currently in the phase of closing out the cases submitted by March 31st, performing the quality assurance evaluation projects, working on the legislative audit, reflecting on the successes/what can be better evaluations in preparation of UniteCT2.0. I know you know the impact of my committed leadership as the Director and the state has benefitted significantly from the efforts. The level of integrity, attention to detail, constant evolution to enhance the program delivery and prevention of fraud and abuse have allowed for the recognition on the national level and additional performance funding awards of $40million and $11million under ERA I. With over 70,000 cases funded to almost 50,000 unique households helping over 11,000 unique landlords, and contracting for administrative services, UniteCT has infused over $360million into CT's economy under my leadership as Director in only 18 months.

I feel that the OTG does not have a good understanding of the culture and hostility that has become a thread through the Department of Housing under this leadership. While I understand the connection to the minority caucus is very important it seems at a significant cost. I feel confident that you know enough about me from the work that we did together to realize that I'm taking a risk to share my concerns because if I don't it means I'm part of the problem. Commissioner Bruno leads with an "iron fist", is judgmental, inconsistent and authoritative. I don't think anyone working with her will speak freely due to the threats and hostility if anyone "crosses" the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner but would encourage your office to find ways to confidentially do research.

A few thoughts regarding the program:

- November 2021 it became clear that UniteCT was being used as a subsidy program and there was significant increase of fraud/abuse interception required.
- Despite strong recommendation and numerous explanations of my strong belief that continuing to work with the Accounting Firms for the consulting services and case review from October – November 2021, the Commissioner directed that those staff members would be offboarded as the contracts would be moved to the nonprofit partners. Earlier in 2021 UniteCT worked with the non profit partners for case review services and determined that the skill levels were not adequate for the work that needed to be accomplished. At that time we contracted with four additional state approved Accounting firms.
- In November and December the operations consultant staff with Cohn Reznick worked with staff at UniteCT to help train them as much as possible in preparation of their offboard so the UniteCT staff could do the quality assurance, training, onboarding and offboarding of case review staff.
- UniteCT was scheduled to be complete in March 2022 however, due to the change from the accounting firms to the nonprofits, the program needed to be significantly restructured basically starting over again with the staffing which extended the completion of cases at the end of September 2022.

- While UniteCT has extensive tracking to help with evaluating production and cost of case review through the nonprofits, there is a favoritism by the Commissioner which has been a constant struggle to offboard unproductive or low quality staff.
- Staff hired at UniteCT were hired for positions that are not accounting level case review therefore there are continuous struggles with the level of oversight, mentoring, training. Many of the staff are paid at significantly lower incomes and despite efforts to increase their income the Commissioner would not allow it. The Commissioner brought on two of the staff as Executive Assistance to her and while I was working with HR to move them to other positions I learned that there is the possibility of doing internal promotions so the staff with higher responsibilities are able to receive the pay warranted.
- The Press Release came out the same day that HR was having the meeting to dismiss me https://portal.ct.gov/Office-of-the-Governor/News/Press-Releases/2022/10-2022/Governor-Lamont-Announces-Connecticut-Receives-Additional-11M-for-Emergency-Rental
- The $11million was a re-allocation from ERA I due to the high performance of the program, it was received in July and had to be committed by September 30th so that funding will not be able to support the RentBank
- Since the UniteCT Resource Centers will be ending December 31, 2022 we are paying the DOH Homeless Prevention Program staffing funds (about $800k) so they will have be able to continue beyond the current funding expiration, this is the support staff that work with the RentBank households
  After working with Leigh and Steve at DOH, my recommendation to the Commissioner was to allocate funds from the ERA II pot so there was more funding to help negotiate eviction prevention since the RentBank is only $3,500. In addition, we all decided that households who already received UniteCT would not be eligible to receive more – the compliance/search piece of this was not solidified but likely would be self-attestation with a name/rental property address search in the RentRelief portal.
- UniteCT successfully served the Treasury's mission of quickly responding to stop the bleed of the pandemic. Community Action Agencies and towns/cities have ARPA focused rental relief money established so much of the typical support can be provided through those systems.
- UniteCT is expected to have about $50million once the last cases are finalized. The partners and staff have all been participating in conversations about what they would think has the highest impact for UniteCT 2.0 with a goal to negotiate contracts in the last quarter of 2022 and start the efforts the beginning of 2023. The consensus is to marry the rental funding with other funded programs offering housing, services and education so there is higher collective impact for longer term sustainability of the household. I have researched programs that are currently funded through other ARPA funds and the list of programs being developed by other Departments is with Aaron to do introductions to the leaders to talk more about how that might work. One program that has more research and conversations is the Career Connect Program with DOL and the workforce boards.
- UniteCT has submitted two ERA II re-allocation request, one for $60million and the other for $220million. With this significant shift in leadership of the program the state is at risk of losing performance consideration which is how Treasury determines the awards.

The Commissioner has created a very hostile work environment:

- She literally says things like "You will do that because I am the Commissioner and told you to"; "I said no so this is over", "I can do anything because I am the Commissioner", "I'm the boss that's why", "You will shut your mouth and not speak during this"
- There have been a lot of seasoned employees who have left the Department and moved to other Departments – the HR records would show that people who are in the Department are burnt out, positions are not filled when people leave and the staffing infrastructure is falling apart.
- If the Commissioner disagrees with staff (myself and I know of three other people in leadership in particular) she will not talk to them for weeks, she will cancel meetings, not return phone calls, be unavailable for TEAMS and literally not engage with the person she is angry with.
- The Commissioner does degrading things like taking verbal attendance at meetings saying "where is SoandSo" only for their manager to report that they are on vacation or sick, she will tell someone they have to turn on their camera if they aren't visible even when there are too many faces to see them all on the TEAMS screen, she

cuts people off if she doesn't like what they are saying and is simply rude and unkind to many staff that she doesn't care for.

Favoritism:

- If you look at the funding that has gone out during this leadership you will see many significant contracts that have been given to partners that the Commissioner has personal, or prior professional, relationships with
- The Commission favors ethnic females and has discriminated against me being noticeably judgmental and demeaning to the point that staff become uncomfortable.
- The professionals in the state who are well-known, long-term housing partners have very little confidence in the Commissioner and many are afraid of her. She literally says no to people who need gap funding to get housing deals done then funds others because she wants to.
- During a time that there is unprecedented funds available the Commissioner makes it very difficult if impossible for people to get the funding they need.
- A lot of the procedures previously common at the Department have been dismantled leaving partners unsure of how to go through a process for funding that is replicable and fair.
- The Commissioner has poor professional/personal boundaries and feels like she "owns" people when they are working for her. She will require people to attend events and meetings beyond the work day and hold it against them if they don't.

My phone has been overfilled with phone calls, texts, job offers and concern from staff and the community as this news is released. You had the opportunity to work with me to have your own opinion but I want to share the sentiment of where people are left after this decision:

- "Our fearless leader! Thanks for bringing such a heartfelt opportunity for people to connect always. Your kindness and gentleness is contagious, and your have made our team more grounded during the chaos of it all. It's so easy to get caught up in the pressure, but you help us all center our emotions which I appreciate"
- "You lead with grace, calm and respect. You are the only one who could sail this ship or build this plane. I find your words coming out of my mouth and I have so much to learn from your leadership and poise."
- "Thank you for being there for all of us with kindness and a cheery heart. You possess a wonderful combination of expertise and down to earth which I truly appreciate. Your smile makes everything better."
- "What is going on? This seems so out of leftfield"
- "I don't know what happened but I know that I have a lot to thank you for, your patience, your teachings and your model of a woman committed to your work and the program mission. I miss you and will always have you in my prayers and give you the best of life because you deserve it. I miss you so much."
- "I am so upset with the way you were treated and am checking on you."
- "You're such a brilliant lady. It was really nice to get to know you and work with you"
- "I have been thinking about you a lot and am struggling to find the right words. You are such a wonderful person with such knowledge, talents and resilience. This has been a hard one for all of us."
- "The days have been quite different without you. You can't be replaced."
- "I am stunned. I think we all are."
- "We all just learned you are no longer with the program! It literally left us all speechless. You were hands down the best boss I've ever had and I'm super sad you're no longer with us."
- "I can't believe this is happening"
- "What is she thinking? No one knows the program like you and we are in the toughest part of the project. What are we going to do?"

While I realize I am new to a politically charged leadership position I can say that I have navigated very well and am incredible proud of the accomplishments of Team UniteCT. I have over eighteen years of working directly with CEOs and have never experienced such unprofessionalism as I have here at DOH. I have been through restructuring many of times and it is always collaborative, planful and necessary. The only time(s) someone is immediately dismissed is when they are unresolved performance issues or embezzlement. I do believe my dismissal is personally driven, secretive and not in the best interest of the obligation to the State's commitment to Treasury to provide the best program possible. Having it announced that Deputy Commissioner Hanks will be "overseeing" UniteCT is very alarming and contradicts that

UniteCT no longer needs a Director. Commissioner Hanks does not know about UniteCT, will upset the flow of operations and is not respected as a competent leader. UniteCT is truly at risk of significant setbacks and potential issues with compliance due to this decision.

I'm working with HR and consulting an attorney to try to work through this the best way possible. I was anticipating being employed as long as UniteCT was operating and have dedicated my efforts in that manner. I actually am a person who believes there is something better around the corner and know I will continue to climb. If there are opportunities for placement that you see in the state that you think would be a good next step please let me know.

Be well Jonny, if nothing else thank you for reading and listening to my feedback. I am coming from a place of concern for everyone working so hard to be good stewards for the funders, and recipients, on behalf of Connecticut.

Make today a great day,

Dawn Parker
