

Additional Workplace Conduct and Behavior

This section of my report documents additional incidents and workplace conduct that occurred following the events described in Part 1. These incidents include concerning behavior, escalation of inappropriate conduct, actions that affected my ability to perform my job duties, and events that took place during the Reno trip.

The information contained in this section is intended to provide further context regarding the workplace environment I experienced at the VACWC and to demonstrate the continuing pattern of behavior that developed after I raised concerns and attempted to address the issues described in Part 1. While some incidents may appear individually significant or minor, they should be considered collectively, as they reflect an ongoing course of conduct rather than isolated events.

The events described below are presented in chronological order to provide a clear and accurate account of what occurred and the impact these actions had on my employment experience.

Outside Influence:

Following the events previously described, the situation appeared to stabilize. However, Willie continued to display frustration regarding Francesca. On multiple occasions, he stated that his wife had told him he would need to begin looking for a new job. He also made inconsistent statements regarding his future as superintendent. At times, he stated that he was considering whether he wanted to remain in the position. At other times, he stated that he would not step down voluntarily and that they would have to physically remove him before he would leave.

During this period, I became aware of Rob, who is Willie's brother-in-law and an HR generalist. Willie stated that he had discussed the situation with Rob. Willie told me that he admitted to Rob that he had sexually harassed me and that Rob responded by telling him to "Stop doing that" when Willie admitted he was attracted to me.

I was also introduced to Rob during a phone call regarding a policy-writing question. In addition, Willie repeatedly stated that Rob had told him that "[REDACTED] can't be fired till after a year."

I include this information because Willie regularly referenced Rob as a source of HR guidance and stated that he sought Rob's advice regarding workplace and personnel matters.

May 18 – Contact With Willie’s Wife:

On the afternoon of May 18, [REDACTED] approached me and requested a meeting with [REDACTED] Willie, and me to discuss “clearing the record” regarding this investigation.

During this conversation, I became concerned that she may not have been thinking clearly. Based on the statements she made, I was concerned for her safety as well as the safety of others involved.

I documented the interaction in an email to Willie and [REDACTED] and requested guidance regarding how to proceed.

At that time, Eric Borneman was out of the office due to his wife’s pregnancy. Because I believed the situation could become urgent, I did not want the matter to remain solely in Eric’s inbox without additional review.

After sending the email, I contacted Michael J. Phillips, Commission Attorney, and also reached out to Mr. Borneman. [REDACTED] and Willie responded to my email and stated, “Yes, we need to reach out to the attorneys.”

Willie Leaves the Office:

After sending the email, I went to the back office and observed Willie angrily packing his laptop and work materials.

Willie told me that he was leaving the office and would be working from home. He stated that he was too angry to remain in the office and that [REDACTED] had essentially admitted that what she had said was false.

Willie then left the office.

Initial Phone Call:

I returned to my office and began packing my belongings. While doing so, I received a phone call from Willie.

When I answered, Willie informed me that his wife was on the other line. My understanding was that this was a three-way call and that she was not calling from Willie’s phone.

At the time of the call, I was still in the office and [REDACTED] was present. I did not want her to know who I was speaking with or that I was involved in the conversation. I informed Willie and his wife that I was still in the office; however, they immediately began speaking.

While gathering my belongings and attempting to leave, I repeatedly tried to remind them that I was still in the office.

As I exited, I stated, "Give me a second, Mom," so that [REDACTED] would not know who I was speaking with.

First Conversation With Alicia Anzalone:

After reaching my car, the conversation continued.

At that point, Willie's wife, Alicia Anzalone, took the lead in the conversation and began criticizing my decision to include Willie on the email regarding [REDACTED]

As she continued speaking, I interrupted several times to explain my reasoning and defend my actions.

During the conversation, I stated:

"I have no traditional HR experience, I have been an assistant to Hr, I am sorry I didn't know what to do, I didn't know what I did was wrong."

"This is my experience, I don't have the same experience as you, I didn't know."

"The lawyers never gave me any rules of engagement I didn't know what to do."

"I am sorry, I didn't know."

Throughout most of this conversation, Willie remained quiet.

As the discussion continued, Alicia's tone appeared to become less confrontational. After I repeatedly explained that I did not know how to handle the situation and apologized, she appeared more receptive to my explanation.

The conversation ended when Alicia received repeated calls from her supervisor. Before ending the call, she told me she would call me back.

Second Call From Alicia Anzalone:

After the call ended, I realized that I had left my laptop in the office. I returned to retrieve it.

Once I was back outside the building, I received a call from an unsaved number: (760) 822-8298.

I answered and determined that the caller was Alicia Anzalone.

During this call, her demeanor was noticeably different from the earlier conversation. She stated that she was not yelling at me and told me that she had personally reviewed my resume. She stated that she believed I was a good fit for the position and that she was already familiar with my experience.

Based on her comments, I understood her to have been involved in reviewing my application materials.

She also stated that what had happened was not my fault because the attorneys had not provided me with rules of engagement.

Extended Discussion:

The conversation continued while I drove home.

When my vehicle disconnected the call, I called Alicia back and the conversation continued. In total, the conversations lasted approximately one and a half hours.

During the discussion, Alicia stated that she helps Willie with business matters but is able to separate her role as his wife from her role as a business professional. She returned to this point multiple times and emphasized that she was able to provide objective advice despite being married to him.

I explained that I was frustrated and that the situation involving [REDACTED] had been stressful and concerning.

The discussion later shifted to sexual harassment.

During that conversation, Alicia referenced the word "Tits" and stated that she believed any statement containing that word was false because she knew that was not how her husband talks.

She then stated, "You don't have to tell me... Actually I don't want to know".

The conversation then shifted to her experiences working in construction. Alicia stated that she was accustomed to experiencing sexual harassment and that it was simply part of being a woman. I responded that I had worked on male-dominated teams and was also accustomed to that environment and those experiences.

During this portion of the discussion, I became uncomfortable with the direction of the conversation. I was concerned about discussing details related to the sexual harassment allegations with Willie's wife because of her relationship to him.

During the conversation, Alicia again stated that she was able to separate being Willie's wife from being a business professional. She also stated that I could tell her anything and encouraged me to contact her if I ever wanted to talk.

The conversation continued briefly before ending.

Aftermath and Concerns:

After the call ended, I was concerned about the appropriateness of the communication and the level of involvement of Willie's wife in workplace matters related to this investigation.

I was particularly surprised because Alicia works in HR. My understanding is that she works for Helios HR. Given her professional background, I was surprised that she participated in a lengthy discussion with me regarding matters connected to an active workplace investigation.

Alicia is not involved in the day-to-day operations of the VAC. However, Willie has repeatedly stated that he consults her regarding workplace matters and seeks her advice and input. Willie also facilitated direct communication between Alicia and me regarding issues connected to this investigation.

Approximately one month before this incident, [REDACTED] told me that I was not just dealing with Willie but was dealing with a team. At the time, I did not take that statement seriously because I believed she was being overly paranoid.

Following the events of May 18, I recalled that statement and viewed it differently.

Reference:

Willie has stated multiple times that he, his wife, and Rob Lockard reviewed resumes together and selected candidates together.

May 25–29: Events Prior to Reno Trip

During the week of May 25 through May 29, staff were preparing for a trip to Reno, Nevada, to obtain accreditation through the NACVSO. I was responsible for travel planning and coordination for the trip.

At the beginning of the week, I hand-delivered travel itinerary packets to [REDACTED] and Willie Borden. The packets contained pickup times, flight information, and general travel details. The top of each itinerary identified pickup locations and pickup times.

The travel plan was for Willie to pick me up from my apartment at approximately 4:00 a.m. and then proceed to the VACWC parking lot to pick up the remaining staff members. This arrangement was intended to prevent employees from having to leave their vehicles at the VACWC while we were out of town. Because the area surrounding the VACWC is not considered particularly safe, I did not want to leave my vehicle there during the trip.

Under the plan, I would be the first pickup. This arrangement was selected because it made logistical sense based on the route from Willie's residence to my apartment and then to the VACWC. It also provided additional time and flexibility for the remaining staff members to arrive at the VACWC parking lot. Staff were instructed to arrive at the VACWC by 4:30 a.m.

This information had been communicated verbally on multiple occasions and had also been distributed in writing through the travel itinerary packets.

Discussion Regarding Travel Plans:

During that week, [REDACTED] and I were in Willie's office discussing travel arrangements. The office door was closed.

Willie was seated at his desk. I was seated in a chair in the corner of the office. [REDACTED] was seated next to me. [REDACTED] were positioned against the large window on the side wall.

During the conversation, [REDACTED] asked what time staff needed to be at the VACWC parking lot. I informed her that they needed to arrive at 4:30 a.m.

This was not the first time [REDACTED] had been provided with this information. The pickup time had already been communicated verbally multiple times and had also been provided in writing.

Following this discussion, Willie stated:

"No, how about I pick up everyone from the VAC first and then come to you."

Willie then began explaining why he believed this approach would be better. He stated that it would be best to pick me up last since they would already be on the way to the highway.

[REDACTED] immediately agreed with Willie's proposal.

I responded that changing the plan did not make logistical sense and that maintaining the original arrangement would be easier. I explained that:

- The travel plan had already been communicated multiple times and distributed in writing.
- Changing the plan at that stage created unnecessary confusion.
- The original plan provided flexibility in the event that someone arrived late or if there were last-minute issues.

Escalation of Discussion:

As I attempted to explain my reasoning, [REDACTED] began talking over me and telling me that I was wrong. Willie then joined them in arguing against my position.

The discussion became increasingly heated. Their voices became louder, and their tone became increasingly aggressive. They repeatedly told me that I was wrong, that I did not understand, and that I should simply do what Willie wanted.

I continued attempting to explain my reasoning and repeatedly stated that the original plan should remain in place because it had already been communicated and distributed.

Each time I disagreed with the proposed change, the discussion became more intense. I felt as though I was being talked over by multiple people at the same time and that my concerns were being dismissed.

██████ attempted to reason with both sides during the discussion.

I was surprised that Willie allowed the discussion to continue in this manner and did not intervene when ██████ began speaking to me in what I perceived as an aggressive and confrontational way.

As the discussion continued, I became visibly upset. I felt overwhelmed, embarrassed, cornered, and confused. I began feeling physically ill and could feel myself becoming emotional.

At that point, I found myself repeatedly saying:

"No, You don't understand."

I could feel tears forming, and my recollection is that the discussion only began to slow down once it became apparent that I was becoming extremely upset.

After the discussion ended, I left Willie's office to calm down.

Follow-Up Conversation With Willie:

At a later time, I spoke with Willie regarding the incident and told him that I did not appreciate the travel plans being changed after they had already been established and communicated.

In response, Willie stated:

"Sorry, I do that sometimes. You just have to get used to it".

Reference: Prior Interaction Involving Travel Planning

This was not the first occasion on which I observed what I considered to be pushy or abrasive behavior from Marlo.

When Willie and I were originally making travel arrangements for the Reno trip, Willie decided to include additional staff members in the planning process, despite my belief that their involvement was unnecessary beyond matters such as seat assignments.

During that planning process, I observed ██████ repeatedly directing how I should proceed. She frequently told me to click specific items, became impatient during the process, and repeatedly insisted that I verify whether the rental car would be available at the airport.

I reminded her multiple times that the rental car pickup location had already been confirmed.

I include this information because I viewed her conduct during that interaction as unnecessarily pushy and aggressive. I felt that she was attempting to control decisions and processes that had been assigned to me as part of my responsibilities.

May 25–29: Discussion Regarding [REDACTED] Access and Master Key:

During the week of May 25 through May 29, Willie came into my office to speak with me. The original purpose of the conversation was to discuss operational matters. I had invited him in because I wanted to ask questions regarding whether employees should be informed that commission meetings were no longer mandatory and to let him know that I intended to check in with [REDACTED] regarding any resource or safety needs she might have while staff were away in Reno.

Discussion Regarding [REDACTED] Employment:

During the conversation, Willie began discussing his plans for the front desk after [REDACTED] was terminated.

Willie stated that he had spoken with Nancy Clark, the Commission Vice President. During the discussion, he spoke as though Nancy had indicated that [REDACTED] was going to be fired.

I was surprised by this statement and asked:

"Nancy said that to you? What did she say?"

After I asked for clarification, Willie changed the direction of the conversation and stated that Nancy had simply called to check on him and see how he was doing.

I did not receive a clear answer regarding whether Nancy Clark had actually told him that [REDACTED] was going to be terminated.

The conversation continued, and I stated that if [REDACTED] were terminated it would likely be appropriate to audit the front desk and determine procedures for her removal in consultation with Michael Phillips.

Willie then began discussing the possibility of hiring a temporary employee for the front desk so that I would have additional time to audit front desk operations and determine how processes were being handled.

I repeatedly told Willie that I would handle the audit and did not believe a temporary employee was necessary.

The discussion became increasingly frustrating for both of us. I wanted to move away from discussing [REDACTED] potential termination because no such decision had been communicated to

me. Willie became frustrated that I disagreed with his suggestions and stated that I was not allowing him to speak, was not valuing his opinion, and was trying to do everything myself. He repeatedly argued that hiring temporary assistance would benefit me.

During this portion of the conversation, Willie became upset enough that he nearly walked out of my office on multiple occasions.

Discussion Regarding [REDACTED] Master Key:

The conversation then shifted to concerns Willie had regarding [REDACTED] access to the building while staff were in Reno.

Willie stated that he was concerned [REDACTED] might enter his office or mine and shred documents while we were away.

He stated that he believed her master key should be taken away.

I responded that if [REDACTED] abused her access privileges and entered an office to destroy documents, that would be a serious matter and could constitute criminal conduct.

Willie appeared dissatisfied with that response and remained focused on removing her access.

He returned to the subject multiple times and continued expressing concern that she might destroy records.

I responded:

"Let her shred the documents. That is a serious unethical move on her part, so just let her do it if she so chooses. That will ultimately not look good on her."

I also reiterated that I believed destruction of documents would be a serious matter and could have significant consequences.

Proposed Plan to Remove [REDACTED] Key Access:

As the conversation continued, Willie outlined a plan regarding [REDACTED] key access.

According to Willie, his plan was:

- To claim that he had lost his master key.
- To ask [REDACTED] for her master key and take possession of it before leaving for Reno.
- To obtain replacement keys for [REDACTED] that would only allow access to certain areas of the VAC office.
- To withhold her master key and continue representing that his own key had been lost.

I repeatedly told Willie that I believed this was a bad idea and expressed concern that it could be viewed as retaliatory.

When I raised those concerns, Willie became increasingly upset.

I also pointed out practical issues with the plan, including that [REDACTED] would likely notice that her access had changed and that replacement keys would need to be coordinated through the health department.

Willie responded that if he reported his key as lost in the parking lot, the situation would be treated as a security issue and replacement keys would be issued without charge.

At that point, the discussion became increasingly difficult to follow. Willie continued raising his voice and repeatedly stated that he was frustrated because I was not listening to him, was not hearing him out, and was not respecting his idea.

He again moved toward leaving my office.

De-escalation of Conversation:

In an effort to calm the situation, I asked Willie to stay and continue the discussion.

I told him that I was not trying to argue with him and that my concerns were based on wanting to protect both him and his position. I explained that I was worried the proposed course of action could create significant problems.

I repeatedly told him that I respected him but was concerned about the potential consequences of the plan.

I also suggested that he discuss the matter with Rob or with his wife before taking any action.

After several minutes, Willie appeared to calm down.

Before leaving my office, Willie stated:

"Don't worry, I will wait for you to forget and then I will do it".

Aftermath and Ongoing Concern:

After the conversation ended, I concluded that I did not want to be involved in any effort to remove or restrict [REDACTED] access in the manner Willie had described.

The conversation raised significant concerns for me regarding both the proposed handling of [REDACTED] key access and the possibility that action could be taken without following established procedures.

As a result of that conversation, I became attentive to any potential changes involving [REDACTED] key access. I was concerned that Willie might attempt to implement the plan he had described despite my objections.

I remained concerned because Willie explicitly stated that he intended to proceed after I had forgotten about the conversation.

VACWC Trip to Reno: May 31 – June 6:

The trip to Reno was generally uneventful at the beginning. Due to several issues with Southwest Airlines, our travel itinerary involved multiple unexpected layovers and schedule changes. As a result, Willie spent a significant amount of time seated with [REDACTED] during various portions of the trip.

During and after the flights, both [REDACTED] expressed frustration regarding Willie's behavior. They told me that he spent much of the trip complaining, and they appeared increasingly irritated by it.

Despite those complaints, the overall mood among the group remained positive. [REDACTED] and I generally enjoyed the trip and maintained a positive attitude throughout the travel process.

We arrived in Reno that evening and went to dinner at the hotel. While waiting for our food, Willie left the restaurant and went into the casino attached to the hotel. After he left, [REDACTED] thanked me for coordinating the trip, guiding them through the airport, and making sure everyone arrived safely. They reiterated that they appreciated the work I had put into organizing the travel arrangements.

Later that evening, [REDACTED] and I discussed the day's travel. She again expressed frustration regarding Willie's complaints during the flights and told me that she had informed him that he complained more than her 16-year-old.

[REDACTED] and I also discussed something we had both noticed during the trip: [REDACTED] appeared noticeably more irritated with Willie than I had previously observed. On several occasions, they appeared impatient with him or challenged him directly. This stood out to both of us because, prior to the trip, the relationship between Willie, [REDACTED] had generally appeared friendly and positive.

I include this information because it provides context for interactions that occurred later during the Reno trip.

Monday, June 1 – Accreditation Schedule Issue:

On the morning of June 1, [REDACTED] went to the NACVSO registration desk and was informed that our team had missed a required class that had taken place on May 31. She immediately contacted Willie and me regarding the issue.

We were informed that because the class had been missed, our team would not be eligible to complete accreditation during that trip. We were presented with two options:

- Remain for the remainder of the scheduled classes, forgo the examination, and complete accreditation online in September.
- Pay an additional \$400 per person to join Willie in the classes he was attending.

After discussing the options, it was determined that the September accreditation option was the most practical course of action.

The news came as a surprise to me. Prior to the trip, I had been informed by Willie and one of the education leaders, in approximately March, that classes would run Monday through Friday. I was therefore unaware that a required class had been scheduled for May 31.

We later learned that more than 100 attendees were reportedly affected by the same scheduling issue and left the event for that reason.

Later that day, while [REDACTED] and I were attending class, both [REDACTED] told me that they had previously noticed a schedule change on either the online itinerary or the event application. They stated that they had observed that one of the classes had been moved and had brought the change to Willie's attention before the trip.

I thanked them for informing me.

Tuesday–Wednesday: Meal Coordination and Concerns Regarding Team Support:

During the trip, Willie maintained possession of the VAC credit card and was responsible for approving or coordinating travel-related expenses. To help ensure everyone had access to meals, I attempted to coordinate meeting locations and meal arrangements for the team.

During this period, [REDACTED] contacted me regarding difficulties obtaining food. She informed me that she was experiencing a migraine and was unable to leave her hotel room. She also told me that she could not afford to purchase food on her own.

I asked [REDACTED] whether she had already communicated her concerns to Willie. She stated:

"Yes, we had been texting back and forth."

Based on our conversation, I understood that she had already attempted to address the issue with him directly.

Because [REDACTED] was unable to leave her room and had not obtained food, I contacted Willie and asked whether I could temporarily take possession of the VAC credit card and coordinate meals for the group. Willie agreed and provided me with the card.

Using the card, I arranged for [REDACTED] to receive dinner.

Afterward, I continued checking in with team members and coordinating meals as needed, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner arrangements. Later in the week, I returned the credit card to Willie.

During the trip, [REDACTED] were generally independent regarding meals and daily activities. Outside of class, I had limited interaction with them. [REDACTED] also spent a significant amount of time with family members who were in the area. I shared breakfast with [REDACTED] and Willie on several occasions during the week.

Observation of Disagreement Between Willie and [REDACTED]

On either Tuesday or Wednesday, I observed Willie and [REDACTED] engaged in what appeared to be a serious disagreement.

I do not know how the disagreement began and did not intervene. However, I observed [REDACTED] crying and Willie appearing visibly angry. Because of the nature of the interaction, I continued to monitor the situation from a distance.

I later attempted to follow up with Willie regarding the incident, but he did not provide many details.

[REDACTED] later spoke with me about the disagreement. She told me that she believed Willie was not following his own expectations regarding use of the per diem for meals and that she felt he had not adequately ensured that she had access to food during the trip.

Based on my own involvement in helping coordinate meals and obtaining food for [REDACTED] I understood why she was frustrated. However, I was unsure what additional action I should take regarding the situation.

Tuesday, June 2 – Lunch Conversation at Biscottis:

During an approximately one-hour break in class, the group met Willie at Biscottis for lunch. Attendees included Willie [REDACTED] and myself.

During the meal, the topic of personal relationships arose and the conversation shifted to Willie's marriage. Willie stated that he and his wife had both been married multiple times previously and that, when they married, they agreed they would not get divorced.

Willie then made additional comments regarding his wife potentially having a boyfriend. He stated that he would not care if she had a boyfriend and made jokes about the boyfriend "paying the bills." He repeated similar comments multiple times during the conversation, framing them as jokes about being comfortable with his wife having a boyfriend.

Jessica and [REDACTED] laughed during this portion of the conversation.

I did not laugh or participate in the joking. The comments stood out to me in light of prior conversations I had experienced with Willie regarding his relationship. It also reminded me of a prior concern I had previously communicated to Eric Borneman, in which I expressed concern that Willie might discuss aspects of his relationship inappropriately with [REDACTED]

Thursday, June 4 - Morning Class and Note Exchanges:

Due to the inability to complete the accreditation exam, our group was permitted to attend Willie's class, which was designated for already-accredited Veteran Service Officers. The group attended the class together, and seating was in the front row.

During the presentation, [REDACTED] and I were paying attention to the speaker. I observed Willie and [REDACTED] texting during the class.

During the presentation, Willie began passing handwritten notes to [REDACTED]. Willie then instructed [REDACTED] to pass a note to me. The note referenced changing our return travel plans and leaving on Thursday rather than remaining for the rest of the scheduled trip.

I responded in writing that I did not believe changing the flights was a good idea and that we should adhere to the original travel plan.

Willie continued attempting to persuade me through additional notes. I also observed him passing notes to [REDACTED] that appeared to include checkboxes. Based on the format, I understood this to be an attempt to gauge agreement regarding leaving early.

I found this behavior disruptive, particularly because it occurred during a live presentation in the front row while a speaker was actively presenting. I also felt embarrassed by the level of visible discussion occurring during the session.

Willie also attempted to pass a note to [REDACTED] read the note, and I gestured for her to pass it to me. She did so. Willie appeared visibly upset when the note was redirected. [REDACTED] later confirmed she also observed his reaction. The note again contained a paragraph advocating for leaving the event early and altering our original travel plans.

Shortly thereafter, Willie passed [REDACTED] a note and then left the table. I whispered to [REDACTED] and asked where Willie had gone. [REDACTED] stated that the material being presented had triggered him.

Lunch at Biscottis:

During the class break, the group went to lunch at Biscottis.

During the meal, Willie brought up Melania Trump and referenced what he described as new information regarding her being a prostitute. He then transitioned the conversation to mail-order brides.

At that point, I attempted to redirect the conversation. I reminded Willie that I am also Eastern European and stated that many women from that region historically became brides due to the communist regime as a matter of survival. My intention was to shift the conversation away from the topic.

Willie continued the discussion despite my attempt to redirect it.

█ then directly asked Willie to stop the conversation, stating that it was deeply offensive to her due to its connection to her family. Willie did not appear pleased with this request.

Discussion Regarding Early Departure:

Following this, Willie again raised the topic of changing our return flights.

I reiterated that I did not believe changing the travel arrangements was advisable. I explained that, based on my prior experience coordinating travel, it was generally best to adhere to established plans once they had been communicated, particularly given the risk of cancellations and complications associated with last-minute changes.

In response, Willie stated that he was a travel agent. I responded nonverbally by waving my hand and saying, "okay, okay," in an attempt to acknowledge his point and de-escalate the discussion.

Willie then stated:

"Don't do that, that is insanely disrespectful".

I immediately apologized and clarified that I did not intend to be disrespectful. I explained that my gesture was intended to concede the point and avoid further argument. I again apologized if my actions were perceived as disrespectful.

I then attempted to continue the discussion and stated that I believed impatience regarding leaving was not the best approach.

While I was speaking directly to Willie, █ stated:

"I'm not being impatient".

I responded that I was not referring to her and did not understand why she believed the comment was directed at her.

Emotional Distress and Temporary Separation:

At that point, I felt overwhelmed and excused myself to the restroom. While in the restroom, I began to cry and attempted multiple times to leave but was unable to do so without becoming more emotional.

I texted [REDACTED] and informed her that I was unable to return to the table and asked her to let me know when the food arrived. During this time, I began experiencing distress and recalled prior incidents in which I felt overwhelmed during group interactions involving Willie [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

After some time, I returned to the table. I observed that [REDACTED] was no longer present.

I had previously asked [REDACTED] via text to request that my food be boxed up.

When I returned, I informed Willie and [REDACTED] that I was not feeling well. Both made a comment suggesting that I might be pregnant. I responded minimally and did not engage further, and the conversation continued briefly in a joking tone.

I then asked Willie if I could return to my room and miss the remainder of class due to not feeling well. Willie agreed. [REDACTED] stated that she would assist me in getting back safely.

Willie then asked [REDACTED] why she would accompany me. [REDACTED] responded that it was to ensure I returned safely to my room. [REDACTED] appeared upset. Willie attempted to clarify that his comment was a joke, and [REDACTED] responded that she did not find it funny.

[REDACTED]'s Room / Evening Interactions:

[REDACTED] sat down in my hotel room and I sat with her. She could tell I was very upset. I began talking to her about my frustration with Willie and the repeated changes to plans, and that I felt like I was going crazy because the situation felt abnormal for a business trip. [REDACTED] agreed and stated that leaving early was never something she was allowed to do when she traveled for business.

To my understanding, the primary reason being discussed for leaving early was that [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] missed their family and wanted the remainder of their Saturday to themselves, and Willie stated that he did not want to lose his weekend. Otherwise, there was no operational or business necessity that I was aware of for leaving early.

Group Messages Regarding [REDACTED]'s Availability:

During this time, [REDACTED] received a text from [REDACTED] in the group chat checking in to see whether there was any update regarding leaving early. The only person the group was waiting on at that time was [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] responded that she would need to check with her friend. She explained that her friend had possession of her car for the weekend and was scheduled to pick her up from the VAC on Saturday when we returned to Rockford.

[REDACTED] called her friend but did not initially receive a response and communicated this to the group chat. After some time, another message was sent, and [REDACTED] called her friend again. Her friend later informed her that she was not able to change her plans. [REDACTED] relayed this information back to the group chat.

Continued Pressure Regarding Travel and Logistics:

Willie then mentioned that he would simply change [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s tickets.

During this time, [REDACTED]'s phone began buzzing and Willie began sending her multiple texts regarding her friend and her house keys. He repeatedly asked [REDACTED] where her friend was so that if he changed [REDACTED]'s flight he could drive her to her friend and obtain the house key. He also asked where her husband was, whether anyone would be home, and whether they could go to his workplace in Freeport to get a key.

[REDACTED] became extremely upset and told me she felt very uncomfortable. We both agreed this was escalating quickly into behavior that felt like bullying. Watching this occur made me very uncomfortable and upset. I was again reminded of earlier incidents where [REDACTED] and Willie be needlessly aggressive and pushy.

[REDACTED] then texted and suggested that Willie just go with [REDACTED]. She stated to me that she would rather he leave us there so she would not have to deal with him, and that she no longer wanted to speak to him or be around him.

Willie responded that we were a team, we came together, and we would leave together. He also mentioned concerns about not having the credit card for meals and baggage costs at the airport.

Due to Willie's failure to take care of [REDACTED]'s needs during portions of the trip, I had already been covering some meals myself on occasion since he was not always reachable. The baggage costs had already been paid for, and there were no additional anticipated costs.

Request to Meet and Escalation:

Willie then asked where the two of us were and stated that the three of them wanted to meet. At that point, our phones were continuously receiving messages.

I responded that [REDACTED] was too upset to meet them, but that I would come downstairs to talk to them. I then asked where they were located.

[REDACTED] responded by asking what [REDACTED] meant and stated she was genuinely curious about what had upset her.

I did not respond to that message and saw that Willie had asked to meet by the conference registration area, which was directly in front of the banquet doors. This was approximately 7:00 p.m., and the banquet was scheduled to begin at 7:00 p.m.

Meeting Near Conference Registration:

The three of them were standing by the empty registration desk when I arrived. Willie and [REDACTED] appeared upset. [REDACTED] was not present at that moment.

I asked where [REDACTED] was, and I was told she was on a call and they gestured in her direction. Willie began to speak, but I told him it would be best to wait for [REDACTED] to join before continuing.

Once [REDACTED] arrived, I informed Willie that [REDACTED] was uncomfortable and that I also found his texts regarding her friend's location, her husband's workplace, and related logistical pressure highly inappropriate.

Willie snapped at me and told me to keep my voice down.

[REDACTED] then began questioning why [REDACTED] was upset, stating that they were only offering solutions and that [REDACTED] needed to be more accommodating. [REDACTED]'s voice was raised during this exchange, and she stated that my interpretation of the situation was incorrect.

I began to restate my point, and Willie snapped again about my voice and tone. I told him that if he was going to police my tone, then he needed to address the conduct of his VSOs. I stated that I did not appreciate [REDACTED] tone and volume.

Willie stated:

"They don't report to you".

I responded that I understood reporting lines but that [REDACTED]'s tone was still inappropriate and made me uncomfortable and highly offended.

Willie did not intervene further.

The discussion continued, and they continued to disagree with my concerns.

Interaction With Daniel Stackhouse:

At that point, I saw a man approaching quickly from the side. He came up to me and said:

"Hey [REDACTED] Are you okay?"

I responded:

"yeah".

Daniel Stackhouse was the man who approached me. He is the Director of the Holmes County Veteran Services Office in Ohio.

He did not acknowledge Willie, [REDACTED] presence. He continued speaking with me and asked me questions, engaging in conversation with me. He did not stand near anyone except me and positioned himself in a way that caused me to turn my back toward the group while speaking with him.

He then asked if I was going to the banquet, and I told him I might and would try to stop by and say hi. We then said goodbye.

Upon leaving, he did not introduce himself to Willie, [REDACTED] even though I made him aware that I was with them.

During my conversation with Daniel, I observed Willie move away and pull [REDACTED] aside. It appeared they did not want to remain near the discussion. When Daniel left, Willie stated, "Let's go somewhere else," referencing interruptions to the conversation.

Relocation and Continued Questioning:

Willie [REDACTED] then began leading me further into the hotel. I did not know where we were going. I asked [REDACTED] and she referenced a meeting room they had used previously. I was unfamiliar with the location but followed them.

During this time, they continued questioning me about [REDACTED] husband, his employment, and why he could not simply provide access to her house keys. They also made repeated comments suggesting skepticism about [REDACTED] inability to comply with their requests.

I attempted to explain that [REDACTED] was not able to change her arrangements. Due to the tone and persistence of the questioning, I felt I needed to be careful in how I responded in order to avoid escalation.

Willie stated he wanted an answer by 7:30 p.m. and instructed me to go speak with [REDACTED] This made me very uncomfortable, as I felt I was being placed in the position of pressuring her.

I confirmed with Shara that she was unable to change her plans and called Willie at approximately 7:30 p.m. to inform him. He stated he would check in with [REDACTED] We did not hear from them for the remainder of the evening.

Aftermath and Safety Concerns:

[REDACTED] and I both agreed we felt unsafe and uncomfortable and did not want to be around Willie, [REDACTED] for the remainder of the evening or the trip.

That evening, I contacted my parents for advice and to inform them of my concerns regarding the ongoing sexual harassment situation and the events of the trip. They agreed to pick [REDACTED] and me up from the airport on Saturday because they did not feel comfortable with either of us traveling alone with Willie.

[REDACTED] also mentioned that she had noticed additional unusual comments from Willie as the investigation was nearing its conclusion. I did not ask for further clarification.

Friday, June 5th:

[REDACTED] and I went down to the conference rooms together that morning. We had not heard anything from [REDACTED] or Willie. A few minutes later, Willie approached us and stated that he had saved three seats for us. Initially, [REDACTED] and I were confused, as we both expected [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] to be present. Upon entering the conference room, we realized it would only be [REDACTED] Willie, and myself. [REDACTED] were not present.

During the class, I received a text from Willie asking me to meet with him after everything was finished. I did not respond.

After the class, [REDACTED] and I went to the restroom. I informed her about the request for a meeting, and we both agreed it would not be appropriate for me to meet with Willie alone. As we exited the restroom, I received multiple additional text messages from Willie. The messages referenced finding a "quiet" or "quieter" place to talk, and he suggested the business center near the conference room. When we arrived, the area was occupied, which made me feel more comfortable, as I would not be alone with him in a closed space.

We then sat in a hallway and began speaking. The initial portion of the conversation involved general discussion regarding travel plans and the remainder of the day. Eventually, Willie dismissed [REDACTED] from the conversation and stated he wanted to speak with me alone. [REDACTED] remained in the hallway within visible distance of us, seated further down, with full line of sight to Willie and myself. I am unsure how much of the conversation she directly heard.

Willie began the conversation by stating he wanted to discuss "where him and I stood personally" and expressed that he was very disappointed in me that morning because I did not "check on my people ([REDACTED])." He stated that I did not follow up with them or send messages such as "safe travels" or ask if they needed anything. He stated that [REDACTED] had brought this to his attention and that he found it "disappointing."

I responded that I was not aware [REDACTED] had left Reno, as I had not been informed by anyone that they had gone home. I only became aware of this when we met with Willie later during the final conference class of the day at approximately 9:00 a.m.

Willie then stated that as leaders we must be impartial and “not take sides,” and alleged that I had taken sides. He stated this was the “second time” this had occurred, referencing a prior situation involving [REDACTED]’s complaint about [REDACTED]. He claimed I initially supported [REDACTED] and later “backpedaled” when information changed. He further stated I had told him he was not taking care of [REDACTED] or following up with her, and that I later changed my position when additional information was presented.

In reference to this prior situation involving [REDACTED] at the time I did feel Willie was favoring Francesca and actively avoiding conflict, which I had raised with him due to a repeated pattern I observed. Willie had stated that [REDACTED] had “switched up information,” but no details, documentation, or specific examples were provided to me. I did not independently verify those claims, as Willie indicated he was handling the matter. I did not “backpedal” or change my position in response to new facts. In the current situation I was subjected to continued arguing, pressure, and invasive questioning regarding [REDACTED]’s personal circumstances. Due to the escalation and hostility from Willie, [REDACTED] I adjusted my communication style in an effort to de-escalate the situation rather than as an agreement or change in position.

Willie further stated that it “came across that I was taking her side because I defended her in every aspect, to include her being bullied and harassed.”

He then stated that we had previously agreed that operational issues would be brought to me and interpersonal issues would be brought to him, and asked why that did not occur in this situation. I responded that I did not know why [REDACTED] did not go directly to him.

Willie then asked, “Why didn’t I send her to him,” and reiterated that the agreed process was that if any staff member came to me, I was to direct them to him. He further stated that because of this situation, he felt I did not support him during our Thursday disagreement.

I apologized and explained that my actions were based on the fact that [REDACTED] had expressed discomfort with him, and given that he was her supervisor, I was uncertain how to appropriately proceed. I stated that I felt caught in the middle and acted based on what I believed was the most appropriate course of action in the moment.

Willie stated that although he understood my explanation, my actions did not reflect that understanding because I “came down and berated and belittled” him, [REDACTED] I asked him to clarify what specific behavior constituted berating or belittling. He responded that it was my tone, attitude, and words, which he described as “highly offensive and disrespectful.”

I responded that I also felt the interaction had become disrespectful, specifically referencing [REDACTED]’s conduct, as well as [REDACTED]’s and Willie’s tone. I apologized.

Willie referenced the prior instance in which I addressed [REDACTED]’s behavior directly in front of him and stated that she had not said anything disrespectful. I responded that her tone, attitude,

and manner of approach were disrespectful, and that this was the second time both [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had behaved in a similarly confrontational manner toward me in Willie's presence.

I further explained that I was confused regarding my role and authority within the organization. I stated that I felt I was placed in a position of leadership but simultaneously told I lacked authority in moments of conflict. I referenced prior statements from Willie, including that "I can't speak" and that "[REDACTED] don't report to me." I also referenced the organizational structure and stated that it was unclear whether I had authority or only situational authority depending on context. I apologized again for the situation while expressing ongoing confusion regarding role expectations.

Willie stated there was a clear distinction in roles, stating I was the "Manager" and he was the "Leader," and that he made final decisions.

I attempted to clarify by referencing prior management experience and standard organizational structures, explaining that managers typically have authority over disciplinary actions, escalation, and direct supervision. I also explained that this environment felt inconsistent with those norms and was a "culture shock" in terms of expectations and authority boundaries.

Willie reiterated that all staff report to him and that disciplinary action comes from him. I explained that in prior professional environments, managers were supported when addressing inappropriate behavior, and that I had expected similar support in this situation. I further explained that I felt undermined when I attempted to address inappropriate conduct from [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] and did not receive backing in the moment.

Willie responded that all co-workers must show respect to one another. I acknowledged this, but reiterated that I believed [REDACTED]'s behavior toward me was inappropriate and escalated the situation. I also mentioned the term "insubordination" but later reconsidered whether that was the correct terminology. Willie appeared visibly frustrated during this exchange.

Willie then stated that the meeting on Thursday started incorrectly, claiming I spoke first and that he intervened stating, "First and foremost, we aren't going to raise our voice." He stated that this set the tone for the entire interaction and suggested it caused others to become defensive. He further stated that I immediately took [REDACTED]'s side, and that [REDACTED] also believed this.

I responded that I felt he had taken [REDACTED]'s side. I acknowledged that I may have been assertive but explained I entered the situation already aware that [REDACTED] felt uncomfortable and had expressed feeling harassed, and I believed the tone of messages sent to her felt aggressive.

Willie attempted to interrupt, reiterating that tone cannot be inferred from text messages. I acknowledged this but stated that regardless of interpretation, the employee had already expressed discomfort, and I viewed the situation as a three-on-one dynamic.

Willie continued stating that there was nothing inappropriate in the messages and compared interpretation of tone to misreading neutral phrases. He stated there was nothing that constituted harassment or bullying and that my interpretation was incorrect.

Willie stated he had consulted his wife and brother-in-law regarding the situation and referenced a suggestion that continuing to remain in Reno did not make business sense financially. He stated there was concern about unnecessary expenses and referenced potential savings for organizational use.

He continued to question [REDACTED] reasoning for not being able to accommodate travel changes and repeatedly stated he did not understand her limitations. He also stated that I had not called him at 7:30 p.m. as instructed.

I clarified that I did, in fact, call him at 7:30 p.m.

Willie again questioned [REDACTED] ability to change her plans and stated he did not see justification for her refusal of proposed travel options. He also stated that if questioned by the commission, he would need to provide justification.

Willie and I continued discussing the importance of training sessions that were missed by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. I stated that the sessions were still important, while Willie stated his portion of the conference had concluded and technically our concluded on Thursday.

Willie then stated that he was concerned about how his actions could be perceived, specifically that he "left people in Reno," and said he would not allow that perception to exist. He stated that this was the reason he remained. He made mention of being worried that a report would be filed.

He reiterated that I had taken sides and stated he would "never not support me," but also stated that I should have addressed concerns privately with him before engaging with the group. I reminded him that he had instructed communication to occur in a group setting.

Willie did not directly answer why he did not address me privately first. He stated that when one person has an issue, it should be addressed as a team, but that conflicts involving conduct should be discussed privately between him and me. He stated I did not demonstrate accountability for my role in the situation.

Willie stated that terms such as "bullying" and "harassment" were being used too freely and that such language can trigger formal investigations. He stated that harassment requires repetition and that isolated incidents do not qualify. He further stated that leadership must correct staff before such statements become "someone's truth."

Willie asked me how many times I had seen him "fly off the handle," stating, "You probably can't count on one hand, because I don't really go off much. I don't harass you, I don't feel the need to."

Willie then stated that other professionals, including a county superintendent and HR-related contacts (his wife and brother-in-law), had advised him to be more strict. He referenced concerns about staff entitlement and reiterated prior per diem disagreements.

He stood up and used his finger while referencing [REDACTED]'s statement as he claimed she was waving her finger in his face, "I am entitled to \$91 a day and I have to eat," stating that if he had acted similarly, he would have been written up.

Willie continued discussing prior incidents and stated he nearly issued an informal warning. He again referenced his wife and brother-in-law as individuals who told him that they would "love to work for him," and insinuated that he was going easy on [REDACTED]

He kept referencing the fact that both his wife and brother-in-law kept asking, "Why he wasn't on a plane yet".

Willie then alleged that I had made a finger-pointing gesture toward him during the incident on Thursday. I clarified that I was not pointing or waving my finger in his face and was standing at an appropriate distance.

Willie stated that my tone, posture, and demeanor were defensive. I acknowledged responsibility for my tone but reiterated that I was responding to a situation in which multiple individuals appeared angry and escalated, and that I felt unsafe and on edge based on the dynamics present.

Willie stated that this type of environment does not exist within the organization and that a review would be conducted upon return to Illinois. He reiterated that [REDACTED] felt I took sides.

I asked whether disagreement with their perspective equated to "taking sides." Willie responded that it did not reflect the facts. I stated that I was reporting the facts as they were presented to me by [REDACTED] based on my direct observations.

Willie again insisted that I was misinterpreting events and stated I had "released frustration" onto the group. He emphasized that in this line of work individuals must have "thicker skin."

I asked where the line of professionalism begins and ends in terms of acceptable behavior. Willie reiterated that terms like harassment and bullying should not be used lightly and that such claims would end up being investigated. He then made reference to [REDACTED]'s report.

I clarified that I was describing [REDACTED]'s expressed feelings. Willie responded, "Based off of her interpretation of a text?" and reiterated that she did not seek clarification or go to him directly.

At that point, I stated that I believed it was best to table the conversation until we returned to the office. Willie agreed but stated he had one final point.

Willie then accused me of "talking shit behind his back," stating he had seen his name appear in text messages involving [REDACTED]. He stated, "This was very disheartening and y'all didn't know this." He further stated he had viewed [REDACTED]'s phone and saw his name appear in messages. When questioned, he stated he only saw his name and did not read the content.

Willie stated that his trust in me was broken and questioned how he could continue to trust me. He stated that I was not being supportive and that I needed to remain neutral. He repeatedly

stated he believed I was speaking negatively about him, based on interpretation of behavior rather than direct evidence. He was unable to provide specific dates or content of messages.

June 6th: Saturday – Traveling Home:

On our flight back to Chicago, while we were waiting in the terminal, [REDACTED] and I were standing in front of Willie. Willie was directly behind [REDACTED] and I was positioned to her right. I observed Willie looking over [REDACTED] shoulder and reading her text messages. When I looked over at Willie and made eye contact with him, he quickly looked away from [REDACTED] phone.

Once we were on the plane, I informed [REDACTED] that she should be very careful with her phone, as I had witnessed Willie reading her text messages.

Due to the events on Thursday, my father stated that he would pick up both [REDACTED] and me so that we would not have to drive back to Rockford alone with Willie. I had also made my parents aware of the sexual harassment.

[REDACTED] friend was able to pick her up at the airport. [REDACTED] left with her friend, and I left with my father.

Monday, June 8th:

Around 12:00 PM, Willie came into my office. He began the conversation by discussing [REDACTED] not wanting to be a VSO and stated that [REDACTED] told him [REDACTED] only wants to do GA. He then said, "I don't understand why she went on the trip to Reno if she knew she didn't want to do claims." I responded that I was not sure, but that I believed [REDACTED] may have recently realized she did not want to focus on claims.

Willie repeatedly restated his position, appearing to imply suspicion regarding why [REDACTED] attended the trip. I reiterated that [REDACTED] may have overheard parts of conversations, but [REDACTED] had only made the comment to me privately while we were speaking informally before a class. I explained that I understood her comments to be her thinking out loud rather than any formal declaration.

Willie then pressed the issue and asked why she would come to me instead of him. I explained that [REDACTED] likely spoke to me because we were already engaged in conversation and she was not yet ready to raise it with him directly. Willie again returned to his original point, stating, "why did she go on the trip if she knew." I reiterated that I did not believe she knew at the time and added that Shara has many ideas regarding outreach for the GA program.

Willie then discussed 90-day reviews and stated that both [REDACTED] and my reviews were coming up this month. I responded that this would be a good opportunity to discuss [REDACTED] GA goals and how we could best support her. Willie appeared unexpectedly supportive of this and discussed additional specialized GA training opportunities for her.

He then brought up the Reno trip and stated that a commissioner had already indicated to him that concerns may be raised regarding the decision not to leave early. I asked which commissioner made this statement. Willie responded that he could not share that information with me.

We then discussed my father picking me up from the airport. At the time of the event, Willie was not aware that my father was coming. Due to Willie's prior behavior and tone, I felt it was better that he not be informed of my father's arrival in advance.

Willie then stated that he was upset that my father picked me up and that he was also upset that neither [REDACTED] nor I texted him when we arrived home. I responded that we were not required to do so. Willie appeared frustrated and stated that it is "common courtesy" and referenced that [REDACTED] had done so. I clarified that [REDACTED] texted him due to travel logistics (boarding and landing flights), and that those communications were operational in nature. Willie responded that they also texted him when they arrived home.

At that point, I was still processing his reaction regarding my father picking me up and did not know how to respond further. Willie again stated that he did not like that he had to drive back to Rockford alone and reiterated that [REDACTED] and I should have texted him, again stating it was "common courtesy." He then stated, "I'm not mad, I'm just pissed."

We then discussed my 90-day review. Willie asked if "I am going to keep picking sides or not" and stated that "I needed to figure out what I was going to do." The tone of the conversation carried a noticeable undertone of pressure. From my interpretation, it appeared Willie was implying that there could be consequences if I did not "stop picking sides."

I asked Willie directly if he was saying he was going to fire me. Willie immediately backpedaled and began stating that people in the office frequently misinterpret what he says. At that moment, I perceived his statement as a veiled threat.

Before leaving my office, Willie again referenced that he believed I was talking behind his back. I again requested clarification, and he was unable to identify any specific conversation he had witnessed. I reminded him that his name is frequently mentioned in text messages, Teams communications, and email, as he is regularly involved in all VACWC communications.

Willie then stated that, in situations like this where someone is accused of speaking negatively, people typically "pull up all the text messages and show the other person their phone." He continued to strongly imply that I should do this.

I reiterated that I was not speaking negatively about him and that I did not know what conversation he was referencing. Willie insisted that most people would show their phone to clear their name and stated that he would do the same.

I responded that even if he would do that, I do not believe it is appropriate or normal workplace behavior. Willie stated, "He got his answer," and began to leave my office. I reminded him again that I was not talking behind his back as he exited.

Monday, June 8th: After Bylaws Meeting

After the bylaws meeting, I was preparing to leave when Willie stopped me in the hallway. At that time, the only individuals present in the hallway were Willie, Dave Davis, Scott Lewandowski, and myself. I had driven separately and did not intend to engage in further conversation with Willie.

As I attempted to leave, I observed Willie positioning himself very close to me and continuing to follow my movement through the hallway. He asked if he was forgetting anything, referring to a prior discussion before he spoke with Michael Phillips, Nancy Clark, and Eric Willard regarding what actions to take concerning [REDACTED]. At that point, we had been informed that the related report had been determined to be unfounded.

I responded that I did not believe anything had been forgotten and continued attempting to disengage and walk away. Willie continued to follow me and repeated variations of the question, asking whether “he/we” had forgotten anything. I repeatedly stated that nothing had been forgotten. During this interaction, I became increasingly uncomfortable due to his continued proximity and persistence in following me despite my attempts to leave the area.

At the same time, Dave Davis was speaking with Scott Lewandowski near the front door. I attempted to position myself closer to them in order to transition into that conversation and create distance from Willie. Eventually, Dave turned to speak with me regarding the front door lock, and I used that interaction as an opportunity to further distance myself. I observed that Willie remained nearby and appeared to be waiting for Dave to leave. I continued to remain close to Dave in order to avoid being alone with Willie.

Willie then asked, “Are we okay?” I responded yes, as I was unsure what specific issue he was referring to. He repeated the question, placing emphasis on the word “we.” I again responded with “sure.”

Willie then stated that he did not want me to think he was trying to replace me and said that he believes in me and in the growth of the VACWC. He further stated that if he were going to replace me, he would tell me directly. He also stated that there would be times when we would not agree, but that “we were building the right way.”

I nodded in response and eventually was able to exit through the front door. Willie followed me outside and again asked whether “he/we” had forgotten anything. I responded that no, everything was fine and that we were all set.

Throughout this interaction, I felt uncomfortable due to Willie’s continued proximity after I attempted to disengage, his repeated following behavior despite clear efforts on my part to leave, and the nature and tone of the repeated “are we okay” statements.

June 9th: Tuesday:

On the morning in question, I sent an email to staff regarding commission meeting attendance expectations based on prior direction and approval provided by Willie. After sending that email, I posted a reminder in the Microsoft Teams group chat referencing the contents of the approved email so staff would have visibility and alignment.

At the time of sending both the email and the Teams reminder, I had not been informed that any change had been made to the policy I had been directed to communicate.

Later that morning [REDACTED] responded in the Teams group chat to my reminder and relayed information attributed to Willie stating that, since this week was different from a typical commission meeting, compensatory time could be used if staff chose to attend, but that this would not apply to other commission meetings.

This message publicly introduced a revised interpretation of the policy that directly contradicted both the email I had sent earlier that morning based on Willie's prior approval and direction and the Teams reminder referencing that approved guidance. This was the first time I became aware that any change had been made.

I responded in the same Teams thread acknowledging Jessica's message and stating that I had not been informed of any change to the policy in writing or verbally by Willie prior to this point. I indicated that I would need to address the discrepancy to ensure clarity and prevent conflicting instructions to staff.

Later that day, I addressed the issue with Willie in person. I asked why [REDACTED] was communicating a policy change in the Teams group chat that I had not been informed of, particularly after I had already issued an email and reminder based on his prior approval. I explained that this resulted in conflicting instructions being presented publicly and stated that it was inappropriate for a VSO staff member to be placed in a position of publicly correcting or contradicting an office-wide communication issued by me based on approved guidance.

Willie responded by stating that I should have first sought clarification before coming to him upset about Jessica's message, and that I should have gone directly to [REDACTED] for clarification regarding her post. He further stated that I was being one-sided and targeting [REDACTED]

Willie explained that he had communicated the change only to [REDACTED] that morning, and that I had not been informed due to him becoming distracted with clients and not completing communication to me or the broader staff at the time. As a result, I was excluded from awareness of the change despite having issued the original approved guidance.

During the conversation, Willie also stated that I tend to infer tone and intent from text messages. I clarified that my concern was not tone or interpretation, but the breakdown in communication structure and the fact that an approved policy had been changed without me being informed, resulting in conflicting instructions being communicated publicly.

Willie reiterated that I should have sought clarification before addressing him and maintained that I should have gone to [REDACTED] for clarification regarding her message. I reiterated that [REDACTED] was relaying information she had been given, and that the issue was not her intent, but the fact that leadership communication had not been centralized, resulting in conflicting instructions being posted in a public group setting without my awareness.

Willie then stated that I was “picking sides” and defending [REDACTED]. I clarified that I was not taking sides and that my concern was strictly related to inconsistent communication, breakdown in leadership coordination, and the operational impact of staff receiving conflicting instructions.

Willie also stated that [REDACTED] believed I was taking sides. I reiterated that my focus was on ensuring accurate and consistent policy communication following previously approved guidance.

Willie further stated that I had an “attitude problem” and claimed he could infer my attitude from my facial expression that morning. I informed him that I was simply tired and not expressing anger or hostility. He maintained that he believed I had an attitude based on his interpretation.

The conversation was interrupted when [REDACTED] knocked on the office door to ask Willie a question regarding a client. Willie responded to her, and the conversation ended shortly afterward when I left his office.

June 9th: Tuesday - Continued:

Later that afternoon, Willie entered my office and stated that he wanted to apologize for the confusion earlier in the day regarding the policy communication issue. He explained that he had spoken with his wife, who encouraged him to apologize to both [REDACTED] and he also encouraged me to do the same.

During this conversation, Willie shifted the discussion to his VA online training access, stating that his training had expired. Earlier in the day, Willie had also expressed frustration regarding an employee named Tracy at the VA office in Chicago, stating that she was making it difficult for him to regain access to his email and required training systems.

Willie stated that he interpreted Tracy’s email communications as having an “attitude,” describing her tone as “dripping” with it. He further stated that he could “read her tone” through the email and that he could sense a dismissive attitude in her wording, describing it as if he could “feel the head swivel” in her writing. He emphasized that, based on her written communication, he believed she did not want to assist him and that her tone reflected resistance or lack of cooperation.

I found this particularly notable given that Willie has previously challenged my own concerns regarding tone and intent in written communications, specifically stating that tone should not be inferred from text messages or Teams communications. In this instance, however, he asserted with certainty that he could accurately interpret negative tone and intent from email.

communication alone. This contrast in approach was inconsistent with the guidance he had provided me in prior discussions regarding interpretation of written communication.

June 10th: Wednesday:

On June 10th, [REDACTED] came into my office and specifically asked me if everything in Reno had gone okay, as she had observed what she described as some hostility or “bad energy” and wanted to check in on the situation. I then provided her with context regarding the events in Reno and the ongoing interpersonal and workplace dynamics that had been affecting me, including difficulty managing the situation created by Willie during the trip. I also referenced an incident from March 25th in which Willie made sexualized comments toward me regarding my social media, which I found inappropriate and which has continued to impact my perception of his conduct and professionalism.

During this conversation, I also raised a separate workplace concern involving an email I observed in Willie’s inbox from Marlo Slaughter. In my role, I typically have visibility into HR-related communications and staffing discussions, as Willie had previously authorized IT (John in IT) to provide me access to monitor his emails due to his workload, a practice that has been in place since March. Because of this, I am regularly included in staffing and HR-related communications such as hiring plans, job descriptions, onboarding/offboarding, and operational staffing discussions. In this instance, I noticed an email request referencing a job description and salary, despite there being no active open positions. The only ongoing staffing discussion I was aware of at the time related to Willie’s repeated statements about removing [REDACTED] from her position, which made any unrelated staffing inquiry feel out of context and concerning given the broader environment.

What stood out to me was that I was not included or looped into this communication, despite my usual role in these processes. I also observed Willie’s response instructing that the discussion remain “off-line” and stating that it was too early to discuss salary or job descriptions. While it was not clear which position the request referred to, the combination of an undefined staffing inquiry, the instruction to keep it off-line, and the exclusion from a process I am normally part of contributed to my concern about transparency and consistency in how staffing matters are being handled.

Dana acknowledged my concerns and expressed that the situation, particularly the email exchange, appeared unusual. She also advised me to speak with Eric Willard, VACWC President, and I agreed to do so.

June 10th: Wednesday:

Around 2:00 PM, I met with Eric Willard at Memorial Hall to discuss events spanning March 25th through the morning of June 10th. While I was speaking with Eric, a thunderstorm was approaching the area.

When I returned to the VACWC office, I observed that Willie [REDACTED] were not present as they were at an outreach event. During this time, Francesca informed us that 20th Street had been closed and expressed concern about being able to drive home safely. Dana subsequently contacted Eric Willard to request permission to close the office early so staff could get home safely. Eric approved the request and indicated that he and Dana would notify Willie of the change.

[REDACTED] began packing up. I remained briefly to ensure Dana was okay and to thank her for her support during this time, as it had been difficult discussing my experiences with Willie with Eric.

As I was preparing to leave the VACWC, I observed [REDACTED] at the front entrance attempting to enter the building. I opened the door and informed them that the VACWC had been closed early due to the storm. I then proceeded toward the elevator when Willie approached me and attempted to stop me. He asked, "Where are you going?" I responded that Eric had closed the office due to the storm. At that time, I was standing inside the elevator doorway while Willie was positioned in the hallway.

Willie then began shouting, "Eric doesn't run the VAC, I do." He continued shouting at me to return inside the office, stating that I did not have permission to leave. I extended my hand to create distance between us as he remained at the elevator threshold. Willie continued shouting for me to come back into the office while I repeatedly responded, "No, you need to talk to Dana and Eric."

Willie appeared visibly angry and began moving toward the elevator in a manner I perceived as an attempt to close distance. I told him to stay back and kept my hand extended to maintain space. At that moment, I believed he was going to physically prevent me from leaving, including potentially grabbing me or blocking me inside the elevator. He then abruptly stopped at the threshold and stated he was only trying to prevent the elevator doors from closing. As he said this, the elevator doors began to close.

I immediately left the building and contacted Eric Willard by phone to report what had occurred. During that call, I received a text message from Willie in the VACWC group chat shouting that everyone needed to report to the office at 8:00 AM for a mandatory meeting, with the exception of Dana. I forwarded a screenshot of this message to Eric.

June 11th: Thursday:

Shara and I arrived at the VACWC at the same time as Dana. Upon entering, Dana confirmed that Eric Willard was present, as we had been informed that either Eric or Nancy Clark would be attending the meeting. Both [REDACTED] and I were uncomfortable entering the office without Eric or Nancy present.

Upon arrival, everyone sat at the back office table for the meeting. Eric spoke for the first portion of the meeting, after which Willie took over and began addressing the group. He distributed the first several pages of the policies and procedures manual. Willie then discussed the events of the prior day and stated that he did not approve of people leaving the office early. He again stated that he "runs the VAC, not Eric."

Toward the end of the meeting, Willie emphasized that Illinois is an at-will employment state and stated that he could fire employees if he chose to do so. Based on the context, tone, and timing of this statement, I perceived it as directed toward me and experienced it as a veiled threat, particularly in light of prior discussions regarding my 90-day review and earlier interactions.

I left the meeting feeling uncomfortable and concerned about my safety. I was reassured by Eric's presence during the meeting, as I believe that without him present, Willie's behavior and tone may have escalated further or created a situation in which [REDACTED] and I could have been isolated.