



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Chris Abele

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DATE: July 9, 2013

TO: Milwaukee Board of Supervisors

FROM: Chris Abele, Milwaukee County Executive

RE: Veto of County Board File No. on 13-570 firing Corporation Counsel Kimberly Walker

---

I am vetoing County Board File No. 13-570 pursuant to the authority granted to me by Article IV, Section 23(a) of the Wisconsin Constitution and Section 59.17(6) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

The County Board adopted an unprecedented resolution on June 20, 2013 firing Corporation Counsel Kimberly Walker.

When I was first elected and conducting a search for a Corporation Counsel candidate who could serve the County professionally and with integrity, I convened a panel of highly respected lawyers from Milwaukee County who are in leadership positions and the most respected law firms in Wisconsin and/or have served at high levels in State government, including Marc Marotta, Cory Nettles, Alec Fraser and Jeff Peelen. All of these lawyers have, at their respective firms, participated in countless hiring processes and all of them understand what makes a great lawyer. This is worth noting simply because they all unanimously selected Kimberly Walker as the top candidate for this position among the many strong candidates they interviewed. They have followed her work at the County and they remain supportive of her work.

I would like to thank Ms. Walker for leaving the private sector to serve the people of Milwaukee County. She has moved the County forward as she professionalized the Office of Corporation Counsel to be more accountable and effective. She has served County government with integrity and enthusiasm for the job and the challenges that we face. I appreciate her legal counsel and honesty; especially when she expresses disagreement, her legal counsel improves the entire County's position and ultimately protects the taxpayers. I have followed her advice without reservation and with full faith as I have sought to improve and professionalize Milwaukee County government. Attracting a professional of her caliber to the County was a significant triumph for the County and a decision I made with both enthusiasm and pride.

Sadly, the County Board fired Ms. Walker without explanation or allowing her to defend herself. They have since denied that this move was politically motivated despite its coming on the heels of Act 14.

Supervisors Bowen, Rainey and Stamper issued a statement to give their reason for firing Ms. Walker: "The fact that she herself said there might be a perception of a conflict of interest in interpreting Act 14 – several times on the record – indicates that she does not believe the Board trusts her to represent them. We don't."

I am shocked at the implication that they are firing here for stating that, to avoid a perception of a conflict of interest, the client – the Board – should seek other counsel. Neither Ms. Walker, nor the many other professional and dedicated public servants watching this spectacle, deserve to be treated this way by the County Board. Attracting accomplished individuals is challenging even without blatant disrespect.

No one who voted to fire Ms. Walker – including these three Supervisors and the new Supervisors who have not had the chance to work with Ms. Walker – contacted her at any point to ask Ms. Walker to explain her statements or positions.

I am unclear on who benefits from this decision, but I am crystal clear on who loses: the taxpayers of Milwaukee County. We lose the benefit of thoughtful and responsible counsel and simultaneously send a message to other accomplished professionals considering public service that they should not take the risk to give back to their community. This and other recent actions by the County Board will make it incredibly difficult to attract talented individuals to Milwaukee County government; I sincerely hope our services do not suffer.

I would finally like to thank the five Supervisors who did the right thing and voted against this unprecedented and unethical firing – Supervisors Alexander, Borkowski, Johnson, Mayo and Taylor.