

Public Comment

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To:Charter Board <CharterBoard@charlescountymd.gov>

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When victims do not respond to wrongs done to them, it legitimizes wrongful acts.

I do not understand her motivation, but the Charter Board's Vice-Chair, Dottery Butler-Washington has elected to firmly reject my request for an apology, and her reply is an open declaration of taking a hard-line approach to the situation which she created. Therefore, I must take appropriate measures to defend myself and protect my reputation.

As a victim of accusations by the Charter Board's Vice-Chair, Dottery Butler-Washington, I must address this injustice. I am an Alternate member, in good standing, of this Board, having attended all meetings including district public hearings. At the September 14 meeting, Ms. Butler-Washington made a motion, which passed, to deny any participation by the three Alternates in any Board business, including sub-committee membership, open discussions, and even Q&A sessions. That action was taken in spite of the County Attorney stating that other County-appointed Committees, do in fact, allow participation by Alternates, and such is consistent with Robert's Rules. It was suggested that we can act as any citizen and anything we have to offer can be submitted as comments in writing. In effect, that meant we were relegated to ordinary citizen participation status, with our obvious right of free speech.

Accordingly, I submitted several suggestions in writing both in the Board's public comment section and directly to some Board members, as I have every right to do.

Moreover, I've continued to offer written suggestions, with supporting justification, both on the record and to members individually, and I've kept a positive approach in spite of being denied active participation with this Board and the multiple accusations against me.

In January, when I sent comments directly to some Board members, Ms. Butler-Washington accused me, in a public manner, of illegally violating the Open Meetings Act.

She asked the acting County Administrator to, "Please inform Mr. Cshawford (sic) that his continued below email blast to the Board is, in fact, an open-act violation (sic) that has been done repeatedly. This is a direct violation of the Open Meeting Law and could lead to possible violations. Please document this for future use."

The response by the County Attorney's Office was "...a member providing electronic comments on a matter of public business to the rest of the board is not in and of itself an OMA (Open Meetings Act) violation..... Mr. Crawford emailed comments on a matter of public business (again, not an OMA violation in and of itself). It is important to note here that the board prohibits

participation by alternates during the meeting, and so email is one remaining way that an alternate may have their opinion considered—email to the board is not per se violative.”

This written opinion confirmed that I was NOT in violation of the Act. I did nothing illegal, as Dottery Butler-Washington charged (and continues to charge).

In a spirit of civility, I requested a simple, but complete and sincere apology from the Vice-Chair. However, on March 14, Ms. Butler-Washington emailed me, and others, this reply, “Hi Mr. Crawford,

Please let me be very clear there will NOT be any apology from me. I say what I said and it was true. You continue to violate the open act meeting even after Chairman Waring ask you not to do it. Look below you just violated it again by emailing the whole board.” Now, I submit that quote as she wrote it, inclusive of the incorrect punctuation, poor grammar, and incorrect reference.

She is WRONG. The County Attorney’s Office said, in writing, it is NOT a violation and I did nothing illegal, as Ms. Butler-Washington charged.

I am incensed at being unjustly accused of a crime by the Vice-Chair and at her firm refusal to offer a warranted and justified apology.

It is unfortunate that the Vice-Chair’s actions require me to make this a public comment, but actions have consequences. I will not tolerate a challenge to my character or staining my reputation by an elected County Official making unfounded charges of illegal actions by me.

I regret that this situation is a detraction of the good work of the other Board members, and may in any way bring this Charter Board into disrepute.

Now, I respectfully again request that the Vice-Chair, Dottery Butler-Washington apologize for her inaccurate charge of illegal action(s) by me. Indeed, I deserve a timely, public apology and also in writing for the Vice-Chair’s charge that my behavior or actions were illegal or in violation of the law. Additionally, such an apology should include an acknowledgement of my Constitutional rights of free speech and redress.

The Vice-Chair should take personal responsibility, extend a sincere verbal and written apology and get past this unnecessary distraction.

Regardless of an apology or not, I needed to correct the record and I remain committed to professionally proceeding with producing a good charter option.

Respectfully submitted,
Jim Crawford

Charter Board, Alternate member