

Sheriff Rick Busch,

I am drafting this letter as a formal complaint against the Howard County Sheriff's Office. This complaint is as a result of Misconduct from the Office in October 2024.

On October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 while employed with the Office, I was placed on Administrative Leave for an office policy violation. I was instructed by Chief Deputy Vandewalker to turn in my county equipment. I met with Vandewalker and was served my Administrative Leave notice. Vandewalker assured me that there would not be a press release.

Within a few hours I received a text from a citizen asking me what was going on. I had a phone conversation with this person and was asked if I had been fired, that I was required turn in my badge, gun, and squad car, and that I had been accused of theft. This person had heard this information from another citizen in the public. I immediately contacted Vandewalker with my concerns Office personnel had released private and confidential information regarding my leave. Vandewalker assured me he had not released anything and only emailed personnel that I was on leave.

Later in the day another private citizen informed me that they had heard I was on Administrative Leave and the it would be all over the news.

I allege that misconduct on personnel within the Sheriff's Office. The Howard County Sheriff's handbook defines members as certified law enforcement officers and employees as civilian personnel within the Sheriff's Office.

Under rules and regulations there is a section of Conduct Unbecoming an Officer:

**12. Members and employees of the Office shall not divulge to any unauthorized person, in or out of the Office, any information concerning the business of the Office. He/She shall not talk for publication, be interviewed, or make public speeches on police business unless authorized to do so by the Sheriff. Violation is CONDUCT UNBECOMING AN OFFICER/EMPLOYEE.**

**18. All members or employees of the Office shall be responsible for all their actions, whether on duty or off duty. Violation is CONDUCT UNBECOMING AN OFFICER/EMPLOYEE.**

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2024, I was contacted by 2 separate news outlets. I did not respond to either message KAAL contacted me on my Facebook messenger to discuss my administrative leave. KTTC news contacted me on my Facebook messenger and sent me an email. The following is the message I received from KTTC:

**Ryder Blair <RBlair@kttc.com>**

**Tue, Oct 29, 2024, 8:48 AM**

**to me**

Mr. Hollenbeck,

I hope you have had a great day!

This is Ryder Blair with KTTC News. We spoke a few month back about your candidacy.

I was hoping you would be interested in sharing your part of the resignation with me on camera for an interview. If not would you please provide your statement for the following.

Did you use county funds for you campaign? If so, please add why.

When did you resign and suspend your campaign?

What are the next steps moving forward?

Thank you,

Ryder Blair

KTTC News

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KTTC then released a news article. I have not read this article, it has been redacted but I received information from the public of the contents. That the Howard County Sheriff's Office released information regarding an investigation being conducted by the Winneshiek County Sheriff and that I had misappropriated county funds. The day of the press release, Vandewalker confirmed that he had not contacted the press. I also confirmed with Vandewalker last week Winneshiek county had been contacted but that there was nothing to investigate. Vandewalker also confirmed there was no report of a crime and no documentation of a criminal investigation. Therefore there is not an allegation of any criminal activity, no criminal investigation, and no criminal charges filed. I allege false and misleading information released by Office personnel and unauthorized press contact.

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Under neglect of duty section:

- 1. It shall be the duty of every member and employee of the Howard County Sheriff's Office to familiarize themselves with the provisions and contents of the Office's official Rules,**

**Regulations, Policies and Procedures Manual, as they deal with the specific general duties of each employee, regardless of rank, grade or position. Failure on the part of any member or employee shall be deemed NEGLECT OF DUTY.**

Under Insubordination sections:

- 1. In matters of general conduct which are not covered in any other section of the Rules and Regulations, members and employees shall be governed by the ordinary rules of good behavior observed by self-respecting, law-abiding citizens and shall conduct themselves in such a manner which will not reflect unfavorably on the Office. Violation shall be deemed as INSUBORDINATION.**
  
- 3. Members or employees shall not speak critically or derogatorily to other members or employees of the Office or to person outside of the Office regarding the orders or instructions issued by a superior officer. They shall report, in writing, to the Sheriff, an order which is in violation of Office Rules and Regulations, or is illegal. Violation shall be deemed as INSUBORDINATION.**
  
- 4. All press releases shall originate from the Office of the Sheriff. Any press releases desired by members or employees shall be approved by the Sheriff or designee prior to their release to the media. This shall not preclude the release of incident reports legally available to the media. Violation shall be deemed as INSUBORDINATION.**

I am requesting a full, comprehensive, and independent investigation into these alleged policy violations. I am requesting all employees and members be investigated to determine whomever violated these policies. I am also requesting discipline be applied to whomever violated these policies to include up to termination.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Respectively,

Richard Hollenbeck