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November 30, 2023

VIA EMAIL TO:
Emma.coleman@roanoke.com

Emma Coleman, Reporter
The Roanoke Times
210 Church Avenue, SW, Suite 100
Roanoke, Virginia 24011

Re: FOIA Request – Gun Violence Prevention Commission Resignation Letters

Dear Ms. Coleman:

I am writing to you in response to your Virginia Freedom of Information Act ("FOIA") request dated November 29, 2023 to the City Attorney's Office for the City of Roanoke, whereby you are requesting copies of the three recently submitted resignation letters of the City of Roanoke's Gun Violence Prevention Commission. Pursuant to your Request, attached please find copies of the requested letters.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be "T. Spencer", is written over a horizontal line.

Timothy R. Spencer
City Attorney

TRS/rrv
attachments

c: Robin R. Viohl, FOIA Officer for the City of Roanoke
Cecelia McCoy, City Clerk



Stacey Sheppard

PO Box 368
Salem, VA 24153

11-01-23

Cecelia McCoy
City Clerk
City of Roanoke
215 Church Ave. SW Suite 456

Dear Mrs./Ms. McCoy:

Last month, at the October meeting of the Roanoke Valley Gun Violence Prevention Commission, I announced my intent to resign from the commission with my term ending December 31 2023. Please accept this letter as official documentation of my resignation.

I have dedicated the past four years of work with the commission to the efforts of studying, preventing and responding to gun violence in our community. The intersection of gun violence and domestic abuse is a passion of mine. I will continue to work in other areas of the city where I can best use my talents and time.

Additionally, my work at TAP is requiring a lot of time in other directions as the need for services is never-ending in our community. And, more so; post pandemic.

I wish the commission all the best in their future in endeavors and, I want to whole heartedly thank the City of Roanoke for this opportunity.

In peace,

Stacey Sheppard

Nicole L. Ross
39 Frances Drive, NW
Roanoke, VA 24017
October 17, 2023

Cecelia McCoy
City Clerk
City of Roanoke
215 Church Avenue SW Suite 456
Roanoke, VA 24011

Dear Cecelia McCoy:

It is with a heavy heart that I submit my resignation. I have served since the inception of the Task Force to Reduce Gun Violence in 2019 and was proud to be one of the nine Commissioners for the Gun Violence Prevention Commission. However, due to the overt verbal attacks toward the Commission and the blatant response from the Mayor and City Council members to hold the Gun Violence Prevention Commission to a different standard than other Commissions operated under their guidance is unfair, unjust and discriminatory. If I can't trust the governing body that is supposed to be in support of our efforts and the city to be equitable, I cannot in good faith continue to serve on the Commission. I will continue to serve this great city that I love as I have for the past 30 years through youth services and community development.

My last day at City of Roanoke will be October 17, 2023 at 5:00pm.

I wish the Commission much success in its efforts to reduce gun violence in our city.

Sincerely,

Nicole L. Ross
Commissioner, Gun Violence Prevention Commission

Cc: Roanoke City Council

Cecelia McCoy
City Clerk
City of Roanoke
215 Church Ave. SW Suite 456
Roanoke, VA 24011

11/21/23

Dear Cecelia McCoy,

This letter serves as my resignation from the Gun Violence Prevention Commission, effective December 2023. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the commission since November 2020, first as the co-chair of the education committee and later, beginning in April 2021, as an appointed commissioner. As commissioners, we have worked closely with our committees and community partners to create and fund countless opportunities for our community. We have researched and leveraged evidence-based approaches to prevent and respond to the needs of our community. We have listened and held space for families and communities as they experience homicides and violence. We have volunteered hundreds of hours of time to improve the health and well-being of our community. For this, I am proud.

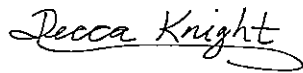
I am disappointed, however, in the way in which our work has become politicized over the past nine months. Members of city council have never sent us any constructive feedback or criticism, asked questions, given recommendations for improvement, or invited open dialogue or collaboration. Yet, certain members of the council have spoken publicly about our efforts and passed judgment on our decisions. Best management practices would suggest that if "supervisors" are concerned with performance, they would first address it with those they manage. This type of feedback, however, has not occurred. In addition, commissioners have written joint letters or addressed the council in person regarding these concerns, yet the politicization continues.

Community- and trust-building are evidence-based approaches to combating violence. However, it is difficult to support that in the wider community when our efforts are consistently undermined and questioned without evidence or validity.

Such dynamics erode trust and support. I sincerely hope that the resignation of three commissioners, all leaders in our community, will give pause to the council as it considers the path forward regarding the commission. I also hope that council members will consider that they are the models for the community and that working collectively to support and heal our community is in all of our best interests.

I wish Joe Cobb and the rest of the commissioners success as they move forward. I will continue to work with the commission through my various community roles and will continue to support collective action to heal our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Decca Knight". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Decca Knight
Gun Violence Prevention Commissioner

Cc: Roanoke City Council