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Shakman Compliance Administrator Releases First Semi-Annual Report

The first Semi-Annual Report outlining the latest findings of current Cook County hiring practices has been released by the Shakman Compliance Administrator's office, headed by retired Cook County Circuit Court Judge, Julia M. Nowicki. The initial report of preliminary findings was issued on January 3, 2007.

Ms. Nowicki was appointed to oversee Cook County's hiring practices and to enforce the Shakman decree by Federal District Court Judge, Wayne R. Andersen, assigned to the Shakman civil lawsuit.

The November 28, 2006 appointment is the latest landmark development in the 38-year-old lawsuit, originally brought by Atty. Michael Shakman in 1969, to protest and eliminate patronage hiring in Cook County.

The First Semi-Annual Report is a six-month overview of the Compliance Administrator's activities, progress and findings. Cook County Board President Todd Stroger has publicly endorsed the importance of the Shakman decree. Ms. Nowicki would like to see the Commissioners follow suit.

Referencing today's findings Judge Nowicki said, "This is a good beginning to what has been and will no doubt continue to be a long process. I am confident that the end result will be in the best interests of all employees and residents of Cook County. More efficient employment practices represent a fiscal benefit to taxpayers and will increase the morale of all County employees, resulting in a better work product."

While the Shakman decree affects the overwhelming number of the more than 27,000 County employees; it should be understood that there are a limited number of positions that are, by necessity, Shakman-exempt.

Ms. Nowicki said, "It is understood that the County Board President must have access to certain categories of employees who are dedicated to helping him fulfill his political

commitments. The plaintiffs and the County are currently in the process of determining which employees should enjoy such exemptions.” Ms. Nowicki is in the process of developing employment practices and policies that ensure fairness across the board.

Continuing Ms. Nowicki noted, “Our office had three primary goals during the first six months of the compliance administration:

1. Study the existing situation;
2. Address any emergencies and;
3. Establish a positive presence at the County to effect immediate change.

We have done so.”

Important tasks completed during the past six months include:

1. Institution of a certification process wherein all Cook County employees who are involved in the hiring/promotional process must sign a form under oath swearing that there were no political factors involved in the course of the hiring process.
2. Anti-patronage training of virtually all interview teams for all new hires, rehires and promotions that were posted by the CA and her staff.
3. Anti-patronage training for all department heads and liaison teams from each department by the Cook County personnel office and the CA and her staff.
4. Monitoring of all phases of hiring.
5. A study of HR practices and policies.

Ms. Nowicki said, “Based on my office’s six-month review the following are some of the more important recommendations we are making going forward.”

1. The identity of Shakman exempt employees should be publicly posted.
2. The CA recommends that an independent desk audit be conducted in one or two targeted departments for grades lower than 17. The County Board has already authorized a desk audit for grades above 17.

“Over the next six months I expect to:

1. Train Cook County employees so as to effectuate a culture free of political consideration in all non-exempt aspects of governmental employment;
2. Consult with HR experts and Organization Development experts to formulate a plan to effectuate the changes necessary;
3. Continue to contact all of the Cook County employees in group settings to answer all questions and;
4. Continue to study and monitor all employment practices in Cook County.”

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