

July 30, 2008

To: The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors
San Bernardino County Government Center
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RE: Concerns Regarding the Public Health Department

Dear Board of Supervisors:

I am writing this letter to you out of deep concern and sincere passion for the department of public health for whom I have been the Acting Health Officer since the resignation of Dr. Margaret Beed. Prior to assuming this role I was the Deputy Health Officer, Chief Medical Officer, Chief of Disease Control and Prevention, the Tuberculosis Controller, and Clinic Physician with the department. Needless to say, I spent much of my time becoming intimately familiar with the many areas in which my programs, personnel, and inner workings of the department at ALL levels function. Thus, I believe it places me in a very good position to express my concerns and thoughts to you.

I would like to outline my greatest concerns, which I would ask be considered and taken seriously by you as you oversee the county and all its departments. I do understand that being in the positions you are in, you must rely on others within the multitude of departments within the county to keep you informed of the activities, issues, and concerns that may arise. To that end, I believe it is my duty to carry out my job in such a manner.

1) I am first and foremost concerned with the competency of the current administration in directing the department of public health.

Coming from a public health background and training in preventive medicine I have been left wondering how it is that the entire public health administration has been selected and placed into the executive positions.

- None of these people have any public health training and it also appears that they have a very limited interest in learning about and understanding the foundation, principles and vision upon which public health is founded.
- While they are proceeding with a (required???) community assessment process, there has been no discussion or plans to include Public Health Department program staff in the process.

2) In my dealings with my fellow administrators I have concluded that they are not qualified for these positions, but have also created situations that may be damaging to the department's infrastructure and the public at large.

- Our administration has fostered a hostile work environment of – intimidation, bullying, and manipulation which has been reported to me by a number of staff; Furthermore, they consistently behave in ways that shift responsibility in order to place blame. These actions have caused my staff to feel they have no recourse to voice their concerns without being dismissed and targeted unnecessarily.
- The administration has been observed on a regular basis to wield their authority with a heavy hand. And as I have overheard in administrative meetings, “[that they] will make changes just because they are in a position to do so ...to keep people from becoming too comfortable.”
- Also witnessed among our leadership are poor administrative and interpersonal skills with constant badgering and poor communication to the programs. People often times become confused because they are directed to carry out orders only to be told to do something in contradiction by another administrator. Bullying, manipulation, deception, and isolation round out a common theme. The hostile work environment is fed by the arrogance our leadership portrays in thinking they are always correct, and that our staff with years of training and experience knows no better. To exacerbate matters several other agencies, and community groups and organizations have expressed their concerns to me over our administration's ability to do their jobs.

3) I am concerned with the administrative staff involved with the integration / reorganization project.

As of this writing they have been placed in charge of what has been termed the “Clinic Integration and Reorganization” project, which, in a nutshell, is to try to provide clinic services from many of our public health programs at each individual clinic site. I do like the idea. However, the administrative staff has proven to be difficult to work with and their decisions have had an adverse impact on the public health programs.

- On a number of occasions, they, I and our programs have reached agreements related to helping clinic operations move forward. Subsequent to our agreements, they have frequently changed their minds without any additional discussions. This has created unnecessary stress and havoc on staff and program operations that are left to figure out the problems this creates. Inevitably, their decisions benefit only the “Clinic Operations” programs without regard for the department as a whole. I have discussed this specific concern on several occasions with the department leadership and have received no support or recognition of the problems that are being created only to be told that our programs should stop resisting.
- I have a deep concern about a Public Health Officer's recommendations being disregarded without consideration thereby placing our County's constituent's health in jeopardy by damaging and neglecting the public health programs.

4) I am greatly concerned about the hiring practices by the department administrators.

I must say that the former health officer was an advocate for public health and was actively pursuing her Master of Public Health degree, for which she should be commended. The health officer's departure was sudden and unexpected, creating the vacancy in which I am currently assigned.

- It would be prudent and beneficial to the department to have leaders with at least a background in Public Health to avoid the appearance of indifference to the community and county at large. Their understanding of public health is critical to carrying out the duties of the department.
- I have witnessed a disregard for the community-based components and vision for which public health was created. In addition, it also appears that they have no interest in learning about or recognizing these critical elements of public health. They have consistently marginalized the input of the Health Officers and their skilled and seasoned public health staff. Their focus has been solely on the clinic integration and reengineering project, which has some merit but is being developed to the exclusion and erosion of other public health programs. This does not seem to fall in line with the “**Service FIRST**” goals of the county.
- In several administrative and supervisory positions within the department you will find that the positions have been assigned to person lacking the minimum requirements as required human resources job descriptions. If these persons had applied through the regular channels they would never have qualified to test.

5) Look further...

I would ask that you not take my words at face value but encourage you to charge the grand jury with investigating the questionable actions of the administration of the department. I further encourage investigators to speak to our current program managers, program coordinators, public health nurses, clinic staff, and other employees regarding the happenings and concerns within the department of public health. You may be surprised at what everyone has to say. Morale is at its lowest, people are leaving **en masse**, and this will continue to occur until something is done to address these problems leaving the department not only in a shambles but also without qualified and experienced personnel.

In Summary:

- I recommend that a county wide, if not state-wide or nation-wide search be done to find qualified people who will be more suited to run the public health department.
- Finally, I would ask that the grand jury be brought in to question ALL current and former public health employees at all levels in order to determine whether or not a great problem or problems exist. In the end, the only reason the department hasn't fallen completely is because of the strength of the managers and employees who are compassionate about Public Health and willing to put up with this chaos in order to protect it.

I sincerely hope that you will do the right thing and investigate this further. What I have presented is only the tip of the iceberg. For the sake of our public's health, our employees, and the county's reputation I ask you to take my concerns seriously. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maury Manligius DO MPH". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

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