

## Letter to the Editor

Editor:

We've all heard the old lawyer joke, "How do you know when a lawyer is lying?" Answer: "When his (her) lips are moving."

As everyone knows by now, Deputy County Administrator Dede Hinote and Facilities Manager Brad Alford filed complaints in October against Commissioner Cecilia Jones for harassment and work interference. The County hired an outside lawyer, Mr. Gary Wheeler, of the Constagny law firm, to investigate the complaint. Ms. Hinote and Mr. Alford hired Ms. Jen Sullivan, of the Guilday law firm, to represent them.

Ms. Hinote and Mr. Alford were not allowed to have their lawyer, or anyone else, present during their meeting with Mr. Wheeler, so they opted not to talk with him.

County Attorney, Ms. Sidney Noyes, initially told Ms. Sullivan it was "the investigator's policy that no one attend the interview . . ."

On October 14, Ms. Sullivan asked Ms. Noyes, "what is the basis for not allowing my client's attorney to attend her (Ms. Hinote) interview on Monday by your outside counsel's office? Please forward the authority for same. Second, does the interviewer intend to record this interview in any way (audio, video)?"

Ms. Noyes forwarded Ms. Sullivan's note to Mr. Wheeler, who responded the next day in writing,

"The reason that the County will not permit you or another attorney representing her to attend is that the County does not believe that it is helpful to create a precedent of allowing interviewees to bring others, including attorneys, with them to internal, workplace investigations. The interview will not be recorded by audio or video but I will be taking handwritten notes."

So, Ms. Noyes is saying it's the investigator's decision, and Mr. Wheeler is saying it's the County's decision. You just can't trust lawyers to tell the truth!

Mr. Wheeler interviewed several people, including Cecilia Jones, husband Jerry Jones, and Ms. Ella Mae Walters (the County Human Resources Director who's on paid administrative leave because of alleged insurance fraud), but other County employees refused to speak with Mr. Wheeler for fear they might lose their jobs.

Ms. Sullivan has asked for Mr. Wheeler's meeting notes, but he refuses to turn them over. The County must be looking forward to losing another lawsuit for violating Florida's Sunshine Law. Once again, the County does what's best for Cecilia Jones, not what's best for the County.

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