



Law Office of Eric R. Brown

Labor, Employment, & Workers' Compensation Law

Eric R. Brown
Law Office of Eric R. Brown
P.O. Box 615
Watertown, CT 06795
888-579-4222
Eric@TheLaborLawyer.com
www.TheLaborLawyer.com
Offices in Farmington and Waterbury

August 10, 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: ATTORNEY ERIC BROWN – 888-579-4222

STATEMENT OF FORMER DPH COMMISSIONER RENEE COLEMAN MITCHELL

My name is Renee Coleman Mitchell. Until May 11, I was the Commissioner of Public Health for the State of Connecticut. And then, in the midst of a public health crisis unlike any we have ever experienced in our lifetimes, I was fired for discriminatory reasons.

I am a Black woman, highly educated and credentialed. I am respected in my field and I have held important and progressively more responsible positions in public health since I entered the field more than 30 years ago. I am a Connecticut native born and raised in Waterbury.

Notwithstanding all the praise that I received over the years, I was fired without a plausible reason. For months, I questioned myself and my expertise as I grieved over the loss of a position I loved after reaching the pinnacle of my profession.

Following more than two months of self-reflection and deep probing conversation with friends, mentors, and colleagues I now have clarity about what happened to me. As our

country faces a reckoning over race and white privilege, I am going to set the record straight in my own words.

I first must thank the dedicated staff of DPH in protecting, improving, and saving lives for the residents of CT throughout this pandemic. While I was Commissioner, we tackled an unprecedented number of public health crises ensuring the health of CT with dedication and effectiveness. Thank you!

To everyone who has valiantly served with me and expressed their dismay at the discriminatory and biased treatment that has been inflicted upon me as wrong and irrational, thank you as well!

Over the last two months I have been able to acknowledge the insidious characteristics of discriminatory bias. They are unwarranted cruelty of oppression perpetuated by intentional efforts to humiliate, erase, discredit, and defame. This historical practice of discrediting and erasing the noble contributions of Black leaders like myself is not acceptable and must end now.

In my case the bias began in earnest in February, 2020 when the Governor made me - a cabinet member chosen for my expertise in public health - subordinate to his Chief Operating Officer during the COVID-19 crisis on matters of public health. My leadership responsibilities were taken away in favor of a young white male with no public health practice or experience; during the worst public health crisis in state history he was put in charge of leading the state's response.

As was reported by the media at the time this young, white, male COO was the pseudo-commissioner, running a shadow department, usurping my responsibilities,

authority, and taking key staff to nullify my presence, voice, and vigor in serving the most vulnerable sectors of the Connecticut population.

Yet, I still fought to give 100 percent of my effort to attain the best possible solutions and outcomes. I know what the consequences could be if I did not! I continued to work with nursing home facilities, community health centers, hospitals, and community-based organizations to explore the best ways to protect patients, residents, and the community.

When COVID-19 entered Connecticut, I was immediately aware of the vulnerabilities faced by our nursing home residents and their caregivers. I sounded the alarm from the beginning to the governor's office. It soon became apparent, however, that I was delivering an uncomfortable message to the governor's office they did not want to hear, or address, and I was met with stiff opposition.

The Governor's Office refused to heed my advice and instead cut me out of deliberations and policy strategy relative to all aspects of COVID-19 planning. I was delayed and prohibited from implementing nursing home protocols that would have saved lives and as a result, the state's response was disastrous until they accepted my strong insistence in which those same protocols are producing life-saving outcomes to this day!

On May 11, 2020, at 8:30 pm, the Governor's Chief of Staff and COO planned and executed an ambushed firing of me over the phone apparently on the governor's orders. I was stunned, shocked, and confused by the vagueness of the purported reasoning: "The Governor is going in a different direction".

Just weeks prior both the Governor and his COS praised my initiation of mobile testing vans in the underserved communities working with community health centers; and for my implementation of nursing-home-extended monitoring and restrictions. My focus was on protecting the most vulnerable citizens of Connecticut while the virus was raging throughout the state.

Thus, any discussion referring to CT's COVID-19 mitigation successes without my proactive and essential contributions would be wholly inaccurate. I am extremely proud of my contributions to saving the lives of Connecticut residents that are still producing lifesaving outcomes!

Mathematica, a policy research firm, has been hired apparently to fully investigate the handling of the COVID-19 response in the state's nursing homes. I have little confidence that I will be interviewed to speak about my intimate knowledge of the facts. I have yet to be contacted. I feel I may be implicated as the culprit behind the state's failure. I will not have it!

I have decided that after all my decades of public health service cultivating my successful career as a Black woman acutely aware of how much more qualified I need to be just for consideration amongst my peers, I will not be invalidated at this point by those doing the administration's bidding. Nor will I be disposed of like trash. I merit recompense for my service to the state and the treatment I am enduring.

The Governor made it clear that my performance was not an issue and promised me a separation package consisting of salary, benefits, and a letter of recommendation reflecting my accomplishments while commissioner. He did not keep his promise.

This unkept promise made by the Governor to me is the correct “historical analogy” of his insensitive and wrong comment about the federal PPP program, when he equated it to “40 acres and a mule” on July 9, 2020. Keep your promise Governor!

Respectfully,

Renee Coleman-Mitchell, MPH

<https://www.change.org/p/ned-lamont-redemption-for-renee>