

PRESS RELEASE

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UNLAWFUL TERMINATION OF DR. AIRICA STEED

The Sherman Boseman Legal Group represents Dr. Airica Steed (“Dr. Steed”). Dr. Steed first learned through the media, and not from MetroHealth System (“MetroHealth” or the “System”) directly, that she was unlawfully terminated today while on an approved FMLA Leave. Dr. Steed, who is the first female *and* African American CEO of MetroHealth, is extremely disappointed in the actions of MetroHealth’s Board of Trustees (“Board”) and is stunned that the Board has taken action that directly conflicts with prior representations made publicly as well as to Dr. Steed privately.

On Wednesday, July 24, 2024, when MetroHealth insisted on making Dr. Steed’s request for FMLA Leave public, William Dube (“Mr. Dube”), MetroHealth’s Vice President of Communications, confirmed that the leave was a “temporary situation” that “would not affect [MetroHealth’s] mission or that important work in any way.” Mr. Dube also wished “Dr. Steed the best as [MetroHealth] awaits her return.” The following day, the Board issued another public statement acknowledging that Dr. Steed was expected to return to her role in mid-August.

Consistent with her communications with MetroHealth, Dr. Steed planned to return to MetroHealth on Friday, August 16, 2024. The Board voiced no objection or resistance to this plan. Since she has been on FMLA Leave, no one at MetroHealth has communicated any performance concerns or other issues to her that would support a termination decision. Instead, the Board has chosen to issue a public statement claiming that “Dr. Steed’s performance is not meeting the needs of MetroHealth” and that they have “lost confidence in her ability to lead the organization[.]” However, even the Board knows that these denigrating statements are not based on actual performance issues inasmuch as the termination letter sent to her by MetroHealth provides that “[t]he Board elected to terminate [Dr. Steed’s] Employment Agreement without cause” with absolutely no mention of any performance issues. A copy of that letter is included with this press release.

Based on what we know, we have good reason to believe that the Board’s decision today is a direct response to Dr. Steed engaging in protected activity. The obvious difference between the official letter sent to Dr. Steed and the public statement issued to the media demonstrates overt animus and an intent to irreparably harm Dr. Steed’s superb reputation and standing in the medical community. Dr. Steed is determined to protect her interests and the interests of other MetroHealth employees who have voiced serious concerns about discrimination and the wrongful treatment of Dr. Steed and others.

Dr. Steed became the CEO of MetroHealth at a very tumultuous time when the System fired its former CEO, Dr. Akram Boutros, and hospital systems all over the country were experiencing financial hardship causing mass layoffs and the elimination of countless positions. Despite this, in Dr. Steed's first year as CEO, MetroHealth met its financial goals and every other goal for 2023, and she was confident that the 2024 goals would be met by the end of the year. In her March 1, 2024 Performance Review, the Board acknowledged this fact by stating that Dr. Steed "met or exceeded expectations" for "Financial Management" and had "done [a] commendable job in [her] first year leading [MetroHealth] during a challenging time."

Since that time, Dr. Steed has internally voiced concerns about discrimination in the workplace as well as other ethical and legal issues, and now the Board has conveniently raised alleged performance deficiencies and disparaged her good name. Dr. Steed, however, will not be silenced and she will be exploring all of her options, including legal action, to right a wrong that should concern every citizen of this community and medical professionals across the county. The purported statement by Dorsena Koonce, a spokesperson for the System, that the Board and Dr. Steed are currently negotiating the final terms of a separation agreement is completely false. Dr. Steed was blindsided by MetroHealth's actions today, and no such negotiations are taking place.

At this time, Dr. Steed will not be participating in any interviews or issuing any further statements, but please direct any media inquiries to our law firm.