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Press Contact:

Jane Gideon

Incendio International

Tel: 415-682-9292

Email: jane@incendiopr.com

After Calls for Criminal Charges Against the CPUC for the San Bruno Explosion and California Wildfires, Chief Judge Karen Clopton Takes Whistleblowing Case to Superior Court

Chief Judge Clopton Claims Ongoing Coziness between CPUC and Utilities Companies has Exposed California Residents to Safety Hazards like the San Bruno Explosion and 2017 Wildfires

SAN FRANCISCO – December 13, 2017 – Chief Administrative Law Judge Karen Valentia Clopton filed her whistleblowing complaint against the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) with the San Francisco Superior Court today. The action moves the case from the politically appointed State Personnel Board to the courtroom. The filing comes a week after both Jim Ruane, the Mayor of San Bruno, and State Senator Jerry Hill called for criminal charges against the CPUC for corruption and obstruction of justice involving the San Bruno explosion and recent wildfires that have ravaged California homes and lands.

Chief Judge Clopton says she was illegally fired from her civil service position for cooperating with federal and state investigators, meeting with legislators about ethical standards, and for speaking out about racism at the agency. The CPUC claimed she acted with “insubordination” when she opposed the commission’s appointment of an administrative law judge with no legal experience, and who had been caught sharing confidential information about judges and ongoing litigation with PG&E, as part of the judge-shopping scandal.

“Administrative Law Judges are public servants who work for the citizens of California and cannot be terminated by political appointees with personal agendas,” said Dan Siegel of Siegel, Yee and Brunner, attorneys representing Chief Judge Clopton. “Terminating Chief Judge Clopton without cause, notice or due process designed to protect public servants is not only illegal, it shows a shocking disregard for the crucial role administrative law judges play in protecting consumers, the public, and democracy.” Siegel is a renowned civil rights attorney, known for winning multi-million-dollar whistleblowing cases against the State of California, including the Commission on Teacher Credentialing backlog case.

In her complaint, Chief Judge Clopton also outlined systemic racial discrimination at the CPUC, including using leadership training materials with outdated and debunked language about race, such as calling African Americans “Negroid” and Asian Americans “Mongoloid.” Chief Judge Clopton is also requesting the CPUC turn over the numerous race-tinged hate letters she received at her CPUC office and her home while working for the commission.

Senator Steven Bradford (D-Gardena) recently issued a statement about Chief Judge Clopton’s termination. “Firing Judge Clopton is two-fold – she was faced with years of constant harassment in a work environment that lacks diversity, and she struck fear in commissioners afraid of the evidence she may or may not have provided to federal and state investigators. This unacceptable behavior by the CPUC cannot be overlooked. As Vice Chair of the California Legislative Black Caucus and former Chair of the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee, I will be calling for an audit of the CPUC’s diversity and employment practices.”

San Francisco Public Defender Jeff Adachi said, “I am most outraged by the CPUC’s attempts to malign a dedicated and excellent public servant. I have worked with Chief Judge Clopton for over 20 years on anti-discrimination laws, the rules of professional conduct, and educational programs designed to eliminate bias in the legal profession and beyond. These spurious allegations against her reveal more about the rampant bigotry at the CPUC than their chosen target.”

About Chief Judge Clopton

Besides serving as the Chief Administrative Law Judge for the CPUC, Chief Judge Karen Clopton is the recipient of the 2017 Robert B. Yegge award. The award is given by the Judicial Division Lawyers Conference of the American Bar Association (ABA) and is presented each year to a current or former ABA member for exceptional and noteworthy work through legal, scholarly or civic avenues. Chief Judge Clopton was also the 2010 winner of the American Bar Association’s Mary C. Lawton Award for Outstanding Government Service from the Section on Administrative Law and Regulatory Practice. Chief Judge Clopton is an accomplished author and lecturer on professional responsibility and corporate governance, regulatory practices and procedures, workplace diversity and discrimination issues, sexual harassment prevention and investigation policies, and alcohol and substance abuse policies. For her, judicial administrative excellence means collaborating across agencies and roles to ensure California laws are ethnically, demographically and technologically in line with the people of California. For more information on Chief Judge Karen Clopton, visit www.karenclopton.com.