

September 18, 2017

Dr. Kathleen Howley, Deputy Vice Chancellor  
Office of the Chancellor  
PA State System of Higher Education  
2986 North Second St.  
Harrisburg, PA, 17110

Dear Dr. Howley,

We the undersigned, members of the SRU Presidential Search Committee who are employed and/or a student at the University, are writing to express concern and to request action on the part of the Chancellor's office and, perhaps, the Governor's office with regard to a series of incidents that occurred during the process of the Presidential Search for Slippery Rock University. This series of incidents culminated late yesterday afternoon, September 17, 2017 when a member of the appointed Slippery Rock University Council of Trustees threatened the Presidential Search committee, bullying the entire committee when questioned about his comment and its intent.

We will elaborate in the paragraphs below, and are requesting specifically the removal of this man, Mr. Robert Taylor, from the search committee and Council of Trustee search-related dialogue, deliberations and voting, because he has conducted himself in a manner that does not reflect an appropriate code of conduct for this search committee role. Evidenced by Mr. Taylor's behavior and his verbalizations, he is not acting in the best interest of the university and is instead acting on a personal issue he has had with one individual. This having been said, we will point out the numerous ways in which Mr. Taylor's behavior has been detrimental to our process from the start, ending in this very unfortunate unprofessional and offensive display yesterday.

Mr. Taylor was unable to attend the first meeting of the Presidential Search Committee in person, so he "attended" by calling in. This in and of itself is not a problem, as other committee members did the same at other times. The concern at this particular meeting was that Mr. Taylor questioned the "purity of the process" since it was being led by a professional consultant, paid by the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). No other committee

member voiced any concern, and a few expressed gratitude for the presence of the consultant whose job, as we saw it, was to shepherd us through the process of effectively hiring the next President of Slippery Rock University. Additionally, at one of the next two meetings of the committee, Mr. Taylor accused the hired consultant of "trying to taint" the process when she indicated she would pre-screen and rank the candidates for us to assist in our review of their qualifications. Again, many of us were very appreciative of her willingness to assist us in this way.

On Saturday, September 16, 2017, following several hours of conscientious consideration, the Presidential Search Committee met to begin conducting neutral site interviews with nine candidates who we deemed to be excellent prospects for the position. Mr. Taylor was late for this meeting and our consultant had to quickly review for him information that he had missed. During each interview, barring none, Mr. Taylor was on his cell phone, clearly not attending to the task at hand. Frankly, we were embarrassed by his behavior as it did not go unnoticed by the interviewees. Again, he exhibited this behavior during every single interview for which he was present, which is highly unprofessional and certainly poor role modeling for the student member of the search committee.

Our last interview of the day on Saturday was with Candidate X (Mohammadi). Mr. Taylor quietly left the premises during the break before Candidate X's (Mohammadi's) interview, without indicating to anyone that he was leaving. No one knew where Mr. Taylor was and we did not want to bring the candidate into the conference room until all committee members were present. Eventually it was determined that Mr. Taylor had left and the interview was begun.

On Sunday morning, September 17, 2017, Mr. Taylor did not attend our pre-meeting session, which we were required attend so we could all debrief and hear reference checks and prepare, and the same behaviors with regard to his telephone continued throughout the day's interviews. Following one interview on Sunday, Mr. Taylor questioned you, the State System's representative, as to whether or not the State System was favoring a particular candidate. He seemed to 1) question your integrity in maintaining confidentiality, and 2) to suggest to other committee members that there was foul play on the part of the Chancellor's Office with regard to this candidate. Again, his interactions were

harassing and an overreach of his responsibility and importance as a member of the search committee. In plain English, he was a bully.

Yesterday, after all interviews had been completed, the committee members were discussing the development of a list of four or five candidates to bring to campus for on-site interviews. After the first list was created, Mr. Taylor stated loudly, with authority, "Do not send Candidate X's (Mohammadi's) name to the Council of Trustees," to which Dr. Cooke asked, "Why not?" Mr. Taylor did not respond to her and a discussion ensued about whether the committee should invite four or five candidates to campus. Candidate X (Mohammadi) was one of the five under consideration and Dr. Cooke felt it was necessary to our process to determine what would happen if Candidate X (Mohammadi) ended up being one of the final two that we sent forward to the Council of Trustees, since the Council would vote on forwarding the names to the Chancellor. After all, what would be the point of having a candidate come to campus, take a great deal of time off from his or her current position, believe that he or she was truly under consideration, and then be denied consideration? Dr. Cooke asked Mr. Taylor what he meant by his comment and his retort was, "I just said it. I don't have to explain." Again, she said something like, "You can't make a threat like that without giving an explanation," to which he repeated, "I made the statement and that's all I'm going to say." We believe that Mr. Taylor's comments were intended to bully the committee members into NOT selecting Candidate X (Mohammadi), and that *he* in fact was *attempting* to make the process "impure" by using his position of authority as a member of the Council of Trustees to sway the committee's decision. He insisted that he did not owe us an explanation, and Dr. Cooke indicated that we would "accept [his] apology" for behaving in such a rude, inappropriate and unproductive fashion. He did not apologize and did not explain his comment. During this exchange, Ms. Mercer asked Mr. Taylor if there was information he could share that the committee needed to know about Candidate X (Mohammadi) as to why he was making this comment. He said "no" and did not further explain the remark.

Mr. Taylor used his status as a member of the Council of Trustees to unfairly, *inappropriately* and *unprofessionally attempt* to impact the result of our lengthy, conscientious search. We have several excellent candidates, and don't believe that Mr. Taylor should be part of our deliberations at any point beyond yesterday **Sunday, September 17, 2017**. His unprofessional behavior, coupled with his

bullying tactics, make him an embarrassment to the committee and unnecessarily deter us from doing the important work to which we are called. This behavior is undermining the process and is not following an acceptable professional code of conduct. To this point his actions *have not* impacted our decisions; however we believe that this has been his intent.

Please note that all of us feel that our process has been honest, ethical and conscientious up to this point and that we are very excited about bringing our identified candidates to the university for on-campus interviews. We have great candidates and are looking forward to bringing this search to a successful close with the hiring of one of these individuals. Our search has been highly successful, and this point must be stressed.

One further point; it is with extreme courage and yet fear of retaliation that we pursue this course. Mr. Taylor has abused his role as a trustee by making an explicit threat and many of us fear retaliation on his part.

Please consider all of these factors and please move to rectify the situation in any way that you can. We have appreciated your participation and insights throughout our process, you have witnessed these events as described herein, and we believe you may be in a position to take appropriate action. If we are incorrect about this, could you please redirect us to the person to whom we should send this information and request?

Respectfully,

Scott Albert, SRU Assistant Vice President, Facilities and Planning

Colleen Cooke, SRU Professor

Malika Fields, SRU Student

Corinne Gibson, SRU Director of Inclusive Excellence

Christine Hernandez, SRU Asst. Professor

Molly Mercer, SRU Associate Vice President, Finance

Amanda Nichols, SRU Clerk, Payroll

Seungku (Steve) Park, SRU Language Center Director

Michael White, SRU Technology Applications Coordinator, Enrollment Manager