

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS AND ETHICS

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December 12, 2108

Start: 1:19 p.m.

Recess: 1:26 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm.
14th FL.

B E F O R E: STEVEN MATTEO
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Margaret S. Chin
Vanessa L. Gibson
Karen Koslowitz
Stephen T. Levin

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

2 [sound check] [pause] [gavel]

3 CHAIRPERSON MATTEO: Good afternoon. My
4 name is Steve Matteo. I'm Chair of the Committee on
5 Standards and Ethics. I'm been joined by my fellow
6 committee members Council Members Levin, Chin,
7 Koslowitz and Gibson. We've also been joined by
8 Council Member Adams who was invited by this
9 committee. We will now continue our meeting on this
10 matter, which first began on October 11, 2018. The
11 committee's agenda for this hearing is straight
12 forward. We are meeting today to assess and address
13 an alleged violation of the city's Conflict of
14 Interest Law and are using our express powers under
15 the Charter to appropriately and conclusively resolve
16 this matter, which was opened on October 11th. More
17 specifically, approximately two months ago this
18 committee was made aware of a purported violation by
19 Council Member Adrienne Adams of the City's
20 prohibition of superiors asking their subordinates to
21 volunteer or otherwise participate on political
22 campaigns. At the committee's direction, the General
23 Counsel's Office immediately undertook investigation
24 of these allegations. This investigation opened on
25 the same day the purported behavior was identified.

2 This committee then worked with the General Counsel's
3 Office to carry out an exhaustive and comprehensive
4 investigation into the alleged infractions. During
5 this time, this committee also held meetings pursuant
6 to Public Officer's Law, Section 103-A to stay up to
7 date on the progress of the investigation, and ensure
8 that all relevant facts were gathered. As a result
9 of and based upon these regular briefings from the
10 Office of the General Counsel as to the results of
11 the investigation, this committee ultimately
12 concluded by a vote earlier today that a violation of
13 Chapter 68 of the New York City Charter had taken
14 place. Specifically, the Committee and the General
15 Counsel's joint investigation confirmed that a
16 staffer in Council Member Adams' office had been
17 approached by one of her superiors about volunteering
18 for certain political campaigns. The same staffer
19 was then directed to volunteer for certain political
20 campaigns. While none of these campaigns involved
21 the Council Member, nor did the Council Member
22 directly order the staffer to engage in these
23 activities, Chapter 68 was violated the moment the
24 Council Member authorized the request—the requesting
25 of a staffer to engage in political activities.

2 Based upon these findings, the committee concluded
3 that a violation of Chapter 68 had taken place and
4 appropriate responsive action was warranted. The
5 committee also voted to send a letter to the Conflict
6 of Interest Board after today's meeting notifying the
7 Board of the committee's action with respect to this
8 matter. In calling and holding this meeting, we hope
9 to bring this matter to a resolution. To that end,
10 we will now invite Council Member Adrienne Adams to
11 make a statement to the committee.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you, Mr.
13 Chair. Good afternoon committee members. I'm here
14 to take responsibility and apologize for violating
15 the city's Conflict of Interest Law. It recently
16 came to my attention that senior staff in my office
17 requested that a subordinate staffer volunteer on
18 political campaigns, and that I inadvertently
19 consented to this conduct. At the time, I didn't
20 realize that asking staff if they wanted to volunteer
21 but not requiring or rewarding it could nevertheless
22 be considered a form of coercion. Naively, I thought
23 that so as long as staff was free to decline there
24 was not a problem with when a staffer invited other
25 staffers to volunteer. As a result, at least one

2 member of my staff was asked to volunteer on their
3 own time and without using any Council resources.
4 Since this came to my attention, I have made it
5 abundantly clear to my staff that there will never be
6 a request to work on a political campaign while they
7 work for me, and that I will not ask anyone to
8 volunteer for any candidate or political activity nor
9 will in any way tolerate staffers who engage in this
10 prohibited conduct. I have recently requested, and
11 my staff and I have completed an in-depth training by
12 the Office of the General Counsel, and I have
13 explicitly instituted a zero tolerance policy on such
14 behavior in my office. My staff is now fully aware
15 that this is strictly prohibited, and my chief of
16 staff has been spoken to about assuring that this
17 does not happen again. In addition, I have
18 personally met with our Chief EEO and Diversity
19 Officer to discuss the issue, and reviewed in detail
20 along with my entire staff the Charter's restrictions
21 and prohibitions on political activity in the
22 volunteering. We all now understand that merely
23 asking a staffer—asking if a staffer would like to
24 volunteer is a violation of the rules. This has been
25 a tremendous learning experience for me and for my

2 staff. We will not make this mistake again, and you
3 have my apology for having done so. Thank, you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MATTEO: Thank you, Council
5 Member Adams. I and members of this committee
6 appreciate your candor in coming before the committee
7 to publicly discuss this matter. It is never easy to
8 discuss matters like these in such a public forum,
9 and your commitment to appear before us today in a
10 display-in a display of such transparency is a
11 powerful statement and valuable service to all of our
12 colleagues in the Council. We are by our very design
13 a political body, and your testimony today will no
14 doubt serve as an example of potential pitfalls as it
15 relates to this issue. With that said, with the
16 Council Member's statement entered into public
17 record, it is time for the committee to bring this
18 matter to a close. As the Council Member noted and
19 this committee agrees, a breach of the city's
20 Conflict Rules arose out of a misunderstanding of the
21 nature of the prohibition in superiors asking
22 subordinates to volunteer in political campaigns. As
23 she also noted, Council Member Adams and her staff
24 received an in-depth training on this prohibition by
25 the General Counsel's Office, which was extremely

2 important to this committee. The Council Member also
3 instituted a strict zero tolerance policy regarding
4 this behavior and ensured this committee that this
5 would never happen again, and never be tolerated.

6 Beyond this, and as we witnessed ourselves today, the
7 Council Member came before this committee and

8 candidly discussed this very sensitive episode in her
9 political and professional life. Most importantly,

10 she has offered today's apology and a statement as a
11 learning opportunity for all public officials and

12 public servants of the city. This committee has also
13 voted on my request to recommend that each council

14 Member receives additional and specialized training
15 on prohibited political activities from the General

16 Counsel's Office in 2019. With all this noted and

17 borne in mind, I am satisfied that the Council Member
18 has been held accountable both personally and

19 publicly for her infraction, and this matter is ready
20 for conclusion and closing, but before I make a

21 motion to close, I just want to remind everyone that
22 this committee is bound a confidentiality agreement

23 not to discuss this matter further. As such, I am

24 making a motion that we close this matter and take no
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2 further action at this time. Is there a second for
3 the motion?

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I second it.

5 CHAIRPERSON MATTEO: I rec—I recognize
6 Council Member Koslowitz and Levin, and all those in
7 favor of closing matter say aye.

8 COUNCIL MEMBERS: [in unison] Aye

9 CHAIRPERSON MATTEO: Aye. Recognizing
10 the ayes, I will now close this matter and adjourn
11 this hearing. [gavel] Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date January 7, 2019