

logo not found or type unknown

Letter Criticizing Ronald Russell as Bad Retiree Representation on GERS Board Sparks Heated Bloodletting

GERS / **Published On February 26, 2023 06:25 AM /**

Beverly Telesford **February 26, 2023**

Image not found or type unknown



GERS Board member Ronald Russell.

Tensions raised by a letter read into the record at the last monthly meeting of the Government Employees Retirement System Board of Trustees have spilled over into the most recent meeting of the body as well.

Two minutes into Thursday's meeting, board member Ronald Russell called for the minutes of the meeting held on January 26 to be amended.

"I have a very strong objection to the minutes being adopted as they are. ... First of all I think we made a mistake by allowing Mary Moorhead to read a letter provided by somebody else into the minutes and then to have it recorded."

Mr. Russell said he saw this as inappropriate and called for the letter to be removed from the minutes. He further stated that concerns about the Board of Trustees should be aired only after "appropriate notice." He said he did not receive Ms. Moorhead's letter even though it was said to be emailed to all members, and thus had no opportunity to appropriately respond to the letter, from St. Croix Government Retirees Inc, expressing no confidence in Mr. Russell, the retiree representative on the GERS Board for St. Croix.

GERS Administrator Austin Nibbs said because a stenographer was present that day, all of the conversations, including the letter, are already in the official minutes' transcript.

He asked Mr. Russell whether he would like the letter to be struck from that official transcript as well, to which Mr. Russell replied in the affirmative. Chairman Dwane Callwood then asked Mr. Russell if he was making a motion. "You can't just arbitrarily strike it because you took objection," Mr. Callwood said.

Mr. Callwood had received a copy of the letter before the meeting, and noted that Mr. Russell had also been copied on the email, so the GERS chair said he viewed the scenario differently.

Mr. Russell then criticized the way the document was revealed in last month's meeting, however, Mr. Callwood noted the standing agenda item in the board's meetings calling for comments and suggestions from retirees. The chair advised Mr. Russell that his feelings about the particular comments received does not make them procedurally incorrect. And reminded Russell that he was given an opportunity to respond to the letter in the meeting, of which Mr. Russell [did take advantage](#).

Board member Andre Dorsey raised a point of information to question the board's attorney Kelsha Williams on whether or not a letter, even though it came from a retiree, should be read in the executive session under personal matters.

While trying to make his point, Mr. Dorsey was interrupted by Mr. Callwood, which kicked off a testy back-and-forth between the two.

"We don't allow the general public to be in the executive session so how is that letter going to be read in the executive session?" Mr. Callwood asked.

"You didn't let me finish though," Mr. Dorsey interjected. "You didn't let me finish, you didn't let me finish. You think you [have] got all the answers, you [are] just jumping in, 'cause you chair. Let our board counsel answer because you don't have the answer. You already shouted that you don't have the answer," he continued.

"The question you [are] asking don't make sense," Mr. Callwood retorted.

"It don't make sense to you, but that doesn't mean it don't make sense, cause it don't make sense to you," Mr. Dorsey fired back. "I need to make my point."

"Go right ahead," Mr. Callwood stated. "Sir, clearly intelligence have [sic] been chasing you [for] a long time and you continue to elude it, so go ahead and continue the question."

Mr. Callwood's last remark prompted Mr. Russell to interject. "Oh boy, so you [are] here attacking people now. This is the best you can do Callwood? This is why you don't need to be chair. You can't help who you are."

"I'm here to do the people's business," Mr. Dorsey continued. "I'm making a point, let me make my point to the counsel. I [am] trying to get clarification for me and other members who may not know. That's all it is," Dorsey said. "So you don't have to try to attack me."

"I don't have to attack you," Chairman Callwood interrupted again.

"I don't know you like that," Dorsey went on. "I ain't throwing no slime back to you, just don't do that, Callwood."

The verbal jousting continued a while longer before Mr. Dorsey said, "Let me finish my point to the counsel, if you allow me, if not Callwood just cut me off, if that's how you feel. If you don't want me to speak today just cut me off."

The board chair then allowed Mr. Dorsey to proceed with his question about the procedure uninterrupted. Mr. Dorsey recalled that in the past, contrary to Mr. Callwood's assertion, people had been allowed to come into the executive session to give remarks.

"So I'm just asking, if it's something against a Trustee or an employee for a personal matter, anything like that, should that be done in the executive session," Dorsey asked.

He went on to suggest that documents received should be disseminated to Trustees a number of days before the item is addressed.

Attorney Williams responded to Mr. Dorsey's first question, saying "if the comments were made during executive session which are not open to the public, I'll have to check the statute to determine whether or not comments that were made in executive session can be stricken from the record, since comments made publicly in the general session are recorded and transcribed and can be made available to the public, comments made during executive session are not."

Mr. Dorsey concluded that he believes future correspondence would be best discussed in executive session away from public scrutiny.

Administrator Nibbs said, "The letter came in to me to be read into the record. I sent it out to all trustees, if Ms. Moorehead was not in attendance, I would've seek [sic] permission to read it into the record, since Ms. Moorhead was in attendance, I let her read her letter into the record."

Mr. Nibbs said he recalled letters being sent before, "attacking administration," and it was read into the record in the members' presence.

Mr. Russell accepted the comments made while articulating his disagreement with the conclusion. He withdrew his motion to have the letter and comments struck from the secretary's minutes.

A motion to accept the secretary's minutes as presented passed with three yes votes. Mr. Russell voted no, Mr. Dorsey abstained, and two Trustees were absent.