



# WASHOE COUNTY

Integrity Communication Service

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## STAFF REPORT

BOARD MEETING DATE: *June 21, 2022*

**DATE:** Tuesday, June 14, 2022

**TO:** Board of County Commissioners

**FROM:** Eric P. Brown, County Manager  
775.328.2003, [epricebrown@washoecounty.gov](mailto:epricebrown@washoecounty.gov)

**THROUGH:** Eric P. Brown

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation to adopt a Comprehensive Employee Support Plan to assist Washoe County employees by providing payment for legal and personal services by outside third-party organizations in situations where employees are unfairly publicly attacked, harassed, or disparaged by members of the public or by political organizations as determined on a case-by-case basis by the Washoe County Manager with input from the Washoe County Workplace Violence Committee. The objective of the program would be to provide employees support against attacks, harassment, or disparagement that occur or originate outside of the workplace but that relate in some significant degree to the role of the subject employees as employees of the county. As such, situations where this program would be utilized are those that would fall outside the scope of representation by the District Attorney's Office or other statutorily or otherwise designated legal counsel, or the scope of services typically provided in-house by county departments. Possible outside organizations to be hired under this program include but are not limited to law firms and public relations organizations. If approved, authorize the Manager to make expenditures not to exceed \$150,000 (aggregate) per fiscal year, with any expenditures above that amount requiring specific approval by the Board of County Commissioners. And if adopted, direct the Manager's Office to work with HR, the DA's Office, and other appropriate county staff and departments to implement the plan. (All Commission Districts).

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### SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to recommend amendment of the current Workplace Violence Committee scope to include consideration of providing legal and public relations support for employees when negative or false comments, threats or accusations are made by members of the public or political organizations in the public domain or on social media that are directed towards Washoe County employees. The decision to support an employee in this situation will be made by the Workplace Violence Committee which may choose to refer the matter to an independent third party legal or public relations firm to assist the employee in legally or publicly defending themselves with regards to such

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claims. The selection of an outside legal or public relations firm will be at the discretion of the County Manager within the spending limits already in place for outside counsel.

**Washoe County Strategic Objective supported by this item:** Innovative Services

### **PREVIOUS ACTION**

No previous action

### **BACKGROUND**

In recent months the public discourse has turned increasingly negative and aggressive with regards to comments, threats, conspiracy theories and false accusations made about government officials all over the country and in Washoe County. In many cases these actions have been particularly hurtful to Washoe County employees and their families and can have the impact of deterring qualified individuals from continuing their careers in government service with the county or discouraging individuals who may be considering careers in government service. Washoe County desires to provide support to employees who find themselves in this situation consistent with existing county policies and procedures that are in place for other workplace violence actions taken against county employees.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

The fiscal impact associated with adopting a Comprehensive Employee Support Plan cannot yet be determined as this is a new program being implemented at the County. Costs for this plan will be absorbed in the adopted budget and recognized in Internal Order #60868 – Employee Support Plan, in the County Manager’s office.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Recommendation to adopt a Comprehensive Employee Support Plan to assist Washoe County employees by providing payment for legal and personal services by outside third-party organizations in situations where employees are unfairly publicly attacked, harassed, or disparaged by members of the public or by political organizations as determined on a case-by-case basis by the Washoe County Manager with input from the Washoe County Workplace Violence Committee. The objective of the program would be to provide employees support against attacks, harassment, or disparagement that occur or originate outside of the workplace but that relate in some significant degree to the role of the subject employees as employees of the county. As such, situations where this program would be utilized are those that would fall outside the scope of representation by the District Attorney’s Office or other statutorily or otherwise designated legal counsel, or the scope of services typically provided in-house by county departments. Possible outside organizations to be hired under this program include but are not limited to law firms and public relations organizations. If approved, authorize the Manager to make expenditures not to exceed \$150,000 (aggregate) per fiscal year, with any expenditures above that amount requiring specific approval by the Board of County Commissioners. And if adopted, direct the Manager’s Office to work with HR, the DA’s Office, and other appropriate county staff and departments to implement the plan. (All Commission Districts).

**POSSIBLE MOTION**

Should the Board agree with staff's recommendation, a possible motion would be:

*"I move to adopt a Comprehensive Employee Support Plan and give direction to staff as set forth in the agenda description for this item."*