



NATIONAL VETERANS AFFAIRS COUNCIL

American Federation of Government Employees, Affiliated with the AFL-CIO

April 4, 2019

Kim A. Graves
Director
St. Paul, MN Regional Office
Department of Veterans Affairs
1 Federal Drive
St Paul, MN 55111
Sent via email to Kim.Graves@VA.gov

RE: Office Space/Equipment for AFGE NVAC National Representative Colin Barrett

Dear Ms. Graves,

I am writing you on behalf of the AFGE National Veterans Affairs Council (NVAC) to seek informal resolution of a union office space/equipment dispute at the VA Regional Office in St. Paul, MN.

On Monday, March 25, 2019 you summarized your response to NVAC National Representative, Colin Barrett's request for office space and equipment. In that summary you proposed that NVAC National Representative Colin Barrett and NVAC National Representative Chet Goree move into shared office space. You explained that separate office space is not available because some managers have to share offices due to space constraints. You also requested that AFGE provide additional information supporting its request for certain office equipment.

Regarding office space, the Master Agreement requires the Agency to provide *separate office space* for Union officers such as National Representatives. *See* Master Agreement, Article 51, Section 1(C) ("The Department *shall* provide to National Union Officers, District Representatives, national Safety and Health Representatives, and other Union representatives, *separate* space, equipment, etc., as provided in this article.") (emphasis added). To move the national representatives into a shared office is categorically not separate, and therefore would violate the Master Agreement. Furthermore, moving them in to a shared office space is not necessary where there is an available office for Mr. Goree (his current office) and an office available for Mr. Barrett (the space that you propose, in addition to other available spaced). Your desire to move certain managers out of shared space and into their own offices is not a defense to the Master Agreement's requirement that you provide separate space to union officers. If you insist of moving Mr. Goree into a shared space with Mr. Barrett, a national grievance will be filed against you.

As an alternative to the shared space that has been proposed by management, the Union maintains that office 4641 on the 4th floor would be a more suitable location for Mr. Barrett to



conduct his National Representative responsibilities. This office is located on the same floor as Mr. Barrett's workstation for his role as a Rating Veterans Service Representative. Allowing Mr. Barrett to remain in close proximity to his work group and management structure would minimize any potential disruptions that could otherwise result from Mr. Barrett's transition to 50% official time.

Article 51 also requires the Agency to provide to union officials described in the article with the same equipment provided to administrative office level officials. It is the Union's position that this would include the provision of an Agency-issued smartphone and a separate computer for Mr. Barrett's National Representative office. The past practice at the Regional Office is to equip AFGE National Representatives (who frequently travel out of state in the course of their duties) with a smartphone and separate computer. For example, Mr. Goree has been provided a smartphone for use in the course of his official time duties and a separate computer for his union office space. These devices were not issued to Mr. Goree for use in his Agency-directed work. If the Agency disputes this position, it will be necessary for the Union to review a list of employees at the Regional Office who have been provided such equipment. This information is necessary in order to properly evaluate the Agency's position in light of the Master Agreement's requirements.

Under the Master Agreement, National Representatives are entitled to office capacity on a level that is "commensurate with other administrative offices within the facility." Agency management has traditionally interpreted this language to require the provision of office capacity on the same level provided to Service Chiefs/Service Line Directors or HR Liaison. Upon information and belief, outfitting the National Representatives at this level would require the provision of the office space and equipment that Mr. Barrett has requested.

Thank you for your consideration of the issues raised in this letter. If there's any other additional information that you need please let me know. I will be the point of contact for the Union on these issues. If there is someone else to you whom you would like me to direct this letter and future communications, please let me know.

Sincerely,



Michael Gillman

Staff Counsel

National Veterans Affairs Council

American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO

CC: Colin Barrett, NVAC National Representative
Chet Goree, NVAC National Representative
Mary-Jean Burke, NVAC 1st Vice-President
Chair, NVAC Grievance and Arbitration Committee