

# Holland & Knight

800 17th Street, NW, Suite 1100 | Washington, DC 20006 | T 202.955.3000 | F 202.955.5564  
Holland & Knight LLP | [www.hklaw.com](http://www.hklaw.com)

Samuel C. Brown  
(202) 469-5460  
[samuel.brown@hklaw.com](mailto:samuel.brown@hklaw.com)

Charles E. Borden  
(202) 469-5461  
[charles.borden@hklaw.com](mailto:charles.borden@hklaw.com)

December 11, 2023

Lisa J. Stevenson  
Acting General Counsel  
Federal Election Commission  
1050 First Street, NE  
Washington, D.C. 20463

Re: Response of Pat Dowell for Congress – RAD Referral 23L-26

Dear Ms. Stevenson:

We write on behalf of our client, Pat Dowell for Congress (“the Committee”), in response to Wanda Brown’s letter dated October 26, 2023, and the accompanying Reports Analysis Division Referral (“the RAD Referral”). This unfortunate matter involves a novice federal candidate whose reliance on a putatively experienced compliance and reporting professional led directly to the errors identified in the RAD Referral. At this stage, the Committee is without funds, and is not in a position to undertake a substantial remediation of the issues presented.<sup>1</sup> In view of these facts, we respectfully request that the Federal Election Commission (“FEC” or “the Commission”) enter into conciliation with the Committee to resolve this matter.

In January 2022, Alderman Pat Dowell faced a daunting task—standing up a campaign operation over a period of weeks while actively campaigning to represent Illinois Congressional District 1 in the June 2022 primary election. Alderman Dowell, who has represented Ward 3 in Chicago since 2007, had no prior federal campaign experience, so she turned to her community to recommend professional staff for her campaign.<sup>2</sup>

With Hope Pickett, Alderman Dowell thought she found just what her campaign needed—an experienced campaign manager with expertise in federal campaign finance rules and

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<sup>1</sup> See Exhibit A, Declaration of Pat Dowell (“Declaration”) at ¶ 16.

<sup>2</sup> See *id.* at ¶ 3, 4; see also ¶ 6.

FEC reporting, deep ties to the community, and the recommendation of another Alderman. Given her campaign's limited resources and tight budget, Alderman Dowell hired Ms. Pickett to perform general campaign management in addition to FEC reporting and compliance services.<sup>3</sup>

Unbeknownst to Alderman Dowell, Ms. Pickett could not deliver on her promises. As the campaign reached its climax in June 2022, Ms. Pickett's communications became erratic. Shortly after Alderman Dowell lost the primary, Ms. Pickett grew increasingly unavailable, and eventually stopped responding to all attempts to communicate.

It was only then that Alderman Dowell and her other campaign staffers realized that Ms. Pickett had failed to institute proper controls and reporting procedures. Even then, the full extent of the problems was not apparent—since Ms. Pickett had been responsible for communicating with the Commission, including by reviewing all correspondence to the Committee's email address on record with the Commission, Alderman Dowell was not aware of the Requests for Additional Information the Committee had received to that point.<sup>4</sup>

With their supposed compliance expert incommunicado, Alderman Dowell and her campaign staffers did what they could to file the outstanding reports. By that time, however, it was too late to address many of the underlying issues. While the Commission sent the Committee Requests for Additional Information ("RFAs"), these went to a campaign email address that was controlled by Ms. Pickett—as such, neither Alderman Dowell nor Mattie Lacy (Treasurer of the Committee) were aware of (i) the RFAs referenced in the RAD Referral at the time they were sent to the Committee or (ii) any of the communications that the Reports Analysis Division ("RAD") logged with a representative of the Campaign referenced in the RAD Referral outside of those with Mr. Robert Charles, a campaign adviser, as he assisted with filing late reports.<sup>5</sup>

Neither Alderman Dowell nor Mattie Lacy had any prior experience with the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended ("the Act"). The requirements under the Act are strikingly different from the requirements under Illinois law that apply to Chicago elections; for instance, candidates for office in Chicago may receive corporate contributions and limits are significantly higher than those of federal candidates.<sup>6</sup> Prior to receiving the RAD Referral, the Alderman was not aware of the requirements of the Act and how those requirements differed from Illinois law and she believed that she had hired a competent campaign manager who would ensure the Alderman's Campaign remained compliant with the Act.

From January 2022 through June 2022 Ms. Pickett met approximately once per week with the Alderman's campaign staff where collectively the team provided status updates. At no point in any of these meetings did Ms. Pickett indicate there were any issues with the Committee being in compliance with the Act, or that the Commission had attempted to communicate with the campaign about compliance issues. Specifically, Ms. Pickett did not disclose any of the RFAs

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<sup>3</sup> See *id.* at ¶¶ 6, 7, 8; see also ¶ 9.

<sup>4</sup> See *id.* at ¶¶ 10, 11.

<sup>5</sup> See *id.* at ¶¶ 12, 13, 14, 15.

<sup>6</sup> 10 Ill. Comp. Stat. § 5/9-8.5.

referenced in the RAD Referral to the Campaign or any attempts from RAD to communicate with the campaign or communications with RAD about compliance concerns.<sup>7</sup>

Alderman Dowell hired Ms. Hope Pickett as campaign manager based on a recommendation from another Alderman in Chicago, and Ms. Pickett's representation that she had experience and the competence to manage a federal campaign in accordance with the Act's requirements.<sup>8</sup> Ms. Pickett's public profile would appear to support her claim at relevant expertise—for example, Ms. Pickett had recently been promoted by Flourish PAC as a “Black Woman to Watch in Illinois Politics” as a “Political Strategist, Fundraiser [and] Speaker responsible for multiple wins locally and nationally for Black Women and Progressives.”<sup>9</sup> Ms. Pickett held herself out as experienced with federal elections, and was publicly identified as the “financial director” for another congressional campaign committee, Kina for Congress.<sup>10</sup>

In March 2023, Alderman Dowell became aware the Committee had missing October Quarterly 2022 and Year-End 2022 reports. Mr. Charles, who like the Alderman had no prior federal campaign finance experience, worked with RAD to ensure those were filed. Mr. Charles additionally worked with RAD to ensure 2023 reports were filed as he became aware of those missing reports and filing obligations. During this entire period, when Mr. Charles and Alderman Dowell attempted to reach out to Ms. Pickett regarding these late reports and mounting compliance concerns, Ms. Pickett evaded communications, stonewalled, and offered no further insight to the issues.

In retrospect, Alderman Dowell deeply regrets her reliance on Ms. Pickett, as well as the compliance issues arising out of Ms. Pickett's work for the Committee. It has now been 17 months since the Alderman lost the primary election, and the Committee has no remaining funds, staff, or compliance resources. Alderman Dowell and the Committee would like to work with the Commission to resolve this matter, and we therefore respectfully request enter into conciliation with the Committee to resolve this matter.

Sincerely,

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<sup>7</sup> See *id.* at ¶ 11, 12.

<sup>8</sup> See *id.* at ¶ 6.

<sup>9</sup> Flourish PAC, Facebook, March 14, 2020, at <https://www.facebook.com/FlourishPAC/posts/meet-the-real-life-annalise-keating-hope-pickett-is-our-powerful-black-woman-to-628560924379181/> (last visited Dec. 5, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* It appears that Ms. Pickett's work for Kina for Congress also resulted in a number of compliance issues. Based on Commission records, Kina for Congress was issued at least six (6) RFAs on its record in 2019-2020 for reporting issues such as missing reports, a discrepancy with the beginning cash balance of one report not equaling the ending balance of the previous report, and at least one contribution misreported.

HOLLAND & KNIGHT LLP

A handwritten signature in green ink, appearing to be 'S.C. Borden', written in a cursive style.

Samuel C. Brown

Charles E. Borden

Rachel Provencher

**Exhibit A**

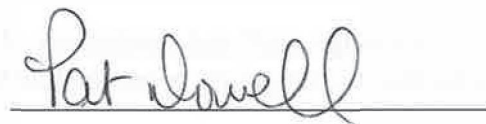
**DECLARATION OF PAT DOWELL**

1. My name is Pat Dowell.
2. I am over eighteen (18) years of age, and I am competent to testify to the matters set forth herein.
3. I have been a Member of the Chicago City Council, representing Chicago's 3rd Ward since 2007.
4. I had no prior federal campaign experience before 2022.
5. I formed the committee Pat Dowell for Congress (the "**Committee**") and became a candidate in January 2022 for the 2022 Primary Election to represent Illinois in District 1.
6. In January 2022, I hired Ms. Hope Pickett to serve as my campaign manager on the recommendation of a colleague on the Chicago City Council, and due to Ms. Pickett's representations that she was experienced with running federal campaigns and had the requisite knowledge to ensure the Committee remained in compliance with the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971, as amended (the "**Act**").
7. My campaign staff and I relied on Ms. Pickett's representations that she was competent with federal campaigns to ensure that the Committee remained in compliance with the Act.
8. Ms. Pickett was responsible for filing campaign finance reports with the Federal Election Commission ("**FEC**").
9. Ms. Pickett, on her recommendation to my campaign's staff, handled the Committee's bank reconciliations.
10. The email address ([info@illinoisfordowell.com](mailto:info@illinoisfordowell.com)) on FEC Form 1 for the Committee is an account that was managed by Ms. Pickett.
11. During the period of time in which I was actively campaigning for the 2022 Primary Election, Ms. Pickett did not alert me, and I am not aware of any indication that Ms. Pickett made to my campaign staff, that the Committee may have any compliance issues under the Act.
12. Ms. Pickett did not disclose to me, and I am not aware that she disclosed to any member of my campaign staff, that the FEC had sent Requests for Additional Information to the Committee, or whether the FEC's Reports Analysis Division had been attempting to communicate and/or communicating with Ms. Pickett about the Committee's compliance issues.
13. Before June 2023, I was at no time aware that the Committee received prohibited contributions.

14. Before June 2023, I was at no time aware that the Committee received contributions that exceeded contribution limits.
15. Before approximately March 2023, I was not aware of any mathematical discrepancies with the Committee's campaign finance reports with the FEC.
16. The Committee has no funds left and is unable to use campaign funds to make appropriate refunds for any excessive or prohibited contributions that it may have received.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the United States of America that the foregoing is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Executed on December 10, 2023

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Pat Dowell", is written over a horizontal line.

Pat Dowell