



## Commissioner reins in Fair Housing director

The Orange County Register  
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SANTA ANA □ The board of the Orange County Fair Housing Council is investigating allegations that the nonprofit is at risk of losing thousands of dollars of grants because of alleged financial mismanagement by the agency's executive director, according to documents obtained by the Register.

A Nov. 19, 2007 anonymous letter sent to the board blames R. Elizabeth Pierson □ the agency's chief executive officer since 1999 □ for a host of problems in the agency, including that she jeopardized mediation and Housing and Urban Development funding.

Thursday, Orange County Superior Court Commissioner Eleanor Palk granted a preliminary injunction against Pierson, ordering that she not interfere with board activities or the investigation. She is also ordered not to incur debt and to hand over all financial records to the board.

The anonymous letter, one of two missives sent to the board behind Pierson's back, is at the crux of an ongoing lawsuit that pits board members against the longtime director. The board sued Pierson last month, alleging she refused to go on administrative leave and interfered with efforts to conduct an outside probe into the complaints.

Pierson adamantly denies interfering into the probe, as well any mismanagement or wrongdoing.

She argues the agency is in better financial condition with an annual budget of almost \$1 million because of her work, according to her deposition in the case.

"Look, Ms. Pierson just needs to stay out of it," Palk told Pierson's attorney, William Weinberger.

Weinberger called the allegations "entirely hearsay."

"There have been a lot of allegations against (Pierson) that says she has interfered with the investigation," Weinberger said. "There is no evidence of that."

The letters blame Pierson for disarray in the agency, saying the agency is unable to make payroll and has to pay employees from the line of credit.

"The Board of Directors □ has turned a blind eye to all of these problems," according to the November letter, purportedly written by an ex-employee.

That letter says the agency lost \$30,000 of its U.S. Housing and Urban Development grant last year due to Pierson's lack of direction to staff members.

David T. Quezada, director of the Los Angeles field office, could not be reached for comment.

The agency had unrestricted net assets of \$657,574, according to a Dec. 15 audit, records show. However, it spent more than it took in during fiscal year 2006-07. It had cash of \$253,867 at the beginning of the year and ate into that to cover expenses, ending up with \$147,157 in cash at the end of the year, according to the audit. Total expenses were \$926,643, while revenues were just \$910,788.

Hani Bushra, who sent one of the letters, contends Pierson gives special treatment to her son, Alex Martin, who is employed as a technical support agency, as well as staff attorney Richard Spix □ who is Pierson's boyfriend. Spix is being paid extra fees as a private attorney, as well as earning a salary, the letter says.

Pierson says Bushra is lying, and sent the letter as retaliation for being denied a \$600 bonus. He denies the

extortion attempt. She said the agency approved the hiring of her son.

Spix maintains his fees for the agency's cases passes legally through payroll.

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