

**Historical Overview of the Dissolution of the Hillsborough  
County Civil Service  
By Kevin Beckner, Executive Director Hillsborough County  
Civil Service Board**

**Introduction**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Hillsborough County Delegation. I must admit that I am quite shocked to be standing here before you today to comment on a proposal that if approved here today, will be filed as a legislative bill that would abolish my agency. Less than a year ago, we were working in concert with the Board of County Commissioners and other authorities to present to you a Bill that would increase the public value of our agency, not abolish it. So how did we get to this point today. I'm going to take you through a brief history of our organization and chain of events that I believe will answer that question.

**Brief History**

Our Civil Service agency was created by the Florida Legislature in 1951 to Remove Political Cronyism and politics in the hiring and firing process of government employees and to increase the efficiency of personnel management by establishing a centralized human resource management system. The elected officials at the time were wise to write the structure and funding mechanism into state law to protect the system from succumbing to the changing winds of politics that could once again leave our government employees vulnerable to political cronyism in the hiring, firing, and promotion process. After many revisions over the past 67 years, the law is now known as the Hillsborough Civil Service Act with the it's Authority granted by Chapter 2000-445 as Amended by Chapter 2007-301 & 2014-230 Laws of Florida. Similar Civil Service agencies began to take root across the state over the next 4 decade. So important is this concept of a merit based

employment system for government - that it is written into the State's Constitution.

Political efforts to dismantle Civil Service Systems and to privatize government agencies re-surface periodically under the alleged need to save money and increase efficiency. Instead, what is left is a system that saves little or no money but strips away the employment rights of employees.

For example, the 2001 effort of People First converted 16,000 state workers to at-will employees. The premise was that centralized personnel management systems were inefficient and not cost effective. Critics would argue that it was a covert attempt to privatize many state government agencies and strip away the employment rights of state employees by converting them to at-will employees. In the end, the employees lost their rights, but little else changed.

A similar effort came to Hillsborough County in 2014 when our constitutional officers and county administrator approached the County Commission, in which I was a member at the time, and made a compelling case that the centralized Human Resources that Civil Service provided was archaic, full of waste and red tape, too expensive, and was preventing them from hiring the best and brightest. I, along with my other colleagues on the Commission, accepted their arguments with the limited information we had, and unanimously supported a legislative effort to allow covered agencies to opt out of Civil Service with the exception of the rules pertaining to the disciplinary process.

As I fast forward to 2019, and now actually having worked as Exec. Director for the Civil Service Board for nearly 19 months and having a much better understanding of our original mission, purpose, structure, I stand here now to candidly testify before you that voting to support that legislative initiative was one of the very few votes that I have

casted as a Commissioner that today I regret. Are some of our processes and rules archaic and outdated? Yes. Are there ways to create efficiencies that could result in substantial savings to taxpayers and create a more effective system for both our employees and appointing authorities? Absolutely and we are working on those efforts today. But what causes me to most regret my decision are the countless employees from the various agencies that have opted out of our rules, most of whom are minorities, in particular individuals of color, that have complained to me about the political cronyism and nepotism that exists in the hiring and promotional process within their agency. I am filled with guilt when I have to tell them that there is nothing I can do because that agency has opted out of our rules that govern those matters. I have to live everyday with that decision I made in the past but live in the present and focus on the future of our organization.

### **Today (2019)**

Since 2014, our budget and staff have been reduced from approximately \$3.2 million and 28 employees to \$1.9 million and 8 employees. There is an egregious mis-information campaign that claims all we do is hear 10 disciplinary appeal cases for \$1.9 million, and that few other agencies utilize our services. That is patently false. We are still a centralized-human resource service provider for 15 agencies. During FY 18, we performed 102 recruitments, reviewed 5,953 job applications, performed 205 classification actions, 1,078 Personal Actions, conducted 10 personnel development training programs, and provided case management services and facilitation for 10 disciplinary appeals. Further these numbers don't reflect the professional Human Resource consulting and risk management services that we provide to our client agencies, or the countless employee consultations we provide to employees regarding their rights who ultimately decide not to appeal. In total, our agency stands ready to offer services to over 9,000 classified employees. It is also worth noting that not a single

constitutional officer is charged for the services we provide. Our funding is provided by statute to ensure that our Board is able to make independent decisions without fear of fiscal retribution by an officer who may disagree with our action taken in favor of an employee's rights.

When I was hired as the Executive Director of the Civil Service Board in June, 2017, my priorities and commitment to the Board was to create a more modern and efficient agency that would increase the value of our services to the employees and agencies that we serve as well as Hillsborough County tax payers. In collaboration with our clients, board, and staff, we developed a strategic plan for our agency that focused on creating efficiencies by utilizing technology to streamline and digitize our processes, and record management system, as well as enhance and expand our service offerings. One of the service offerings was to work in collaboration with the Hillsborough County Dept. Of Economic Development to offer basic Human Resource services to small business and startup companies through the ECC, Entrepreneur Collaborative Center. As a former small business owner and County Commissioner, I recognized the important role that small businesses play in our local economy and how important basic Human Resources are to the success of a business. The County Commission has invested millions of dollars over the years supporting small businesses and startups through the ECC and I believed that our agency could provide value added services within our existing budget. I presented our plan to the County Commission On February 21, 2018 and they unanimously moved to "support a partnership between CSB D/BA/ HR Trust and the BOCC for the purpose of providing human resource related services to private and public sector businesses and organizations within Hillsborough County and directed the County Administrator, County Attorney and staff to work with the CSB to develop the appropriate agreements and MOUs, or recommended legislative action necessary to create and

execute such a partnership.” At no time then or any time since, has the COMMISSION taken formal action to authorize staff to explore the abolishment of Civil Service.

Nonetheless, our General Council and County attorney both independently concluded that to form such a partnership would require the Civil Service Act be amended. Because the ACT requires legislative codification by 2020, we thought it was an appropriate time to have a collaborative, comprehensive Review of our ACT. All agency directors were sent invitations to serve or appoint a delegate to an ad-hoc committee to review the Civil Service Act and provide recommendations for changes. Eleven agencies appointed representatives who attended Ten (10) workshops between May 10 and November 8, 2018. In addition, two separate stakeholder meetings for agency directors were held on August 23 and October 25, 2018 to discuss the proposed changes and receive input. A final draft was sent to engaged agency stakeholders on December 11, 2018. Additional comments were received from representatives of the County Administrator, and the County Attorney’s Office. No other comments or objections were received from other agencies. Subsequent meetings were held with the County Administrator, his delegates, and a representative of the County Attorney’s Office throughout December to finalize a draft bill to present to the BOCC in January. On December 31, I had a final conversation with County Administrator’s Chief Financial Officer to finalize the funding structure and that’s when she sprung a request that I couldn’t in good conscience support—She wanted me to recommend to my Board the repeal of Civil Service Rule 15.2, which gives our agency the core mechanism to provide independent oversight of the disciplinary process.

## CONCLUSION

And so members of the Hillsborough Delegation, my refusal to support relinquishing independent oversight of the disciplinary process is why I believe we are here today. The supporters that have asked you to sponsor this legislation are here to finish what they started in 2014. To abolish the remaining part of an agency that provides independent oversight and protects the due process rights of our employees. Do not allow yourselves to be conned like I was conned into believing that this legislation is about saving money and creating efficiencies. It is not. This legislation is about turning back the hands of time to an era where politics and cronyism ruled the employment and promotion process.

There is absolutely no rush or reason that is not politically motivated to take action today. Our agency is mandated by law to appear before you during the next legislative session to present to you a bill that codifies the Civil Service Act. In addition, the action you are considering taking to abolish Civil Service is contrary to the BOCC's current position, and as you know, it is the BOCC who directs public policy and is the funding fiduciary of our agency.

What I am respectfully requesting of you today is to allow our agency to continue the work we began last year. To allow us to continue to work in collaboration with the Board of County Commissioners, our client agencies, the Employee Advisory Council, and community partners such as the representatives of Labor and NAACP, to present to you a bill next legislative session that will create not only a more efficient and cost effective organization, but one that will continue to provide cost affordable human resource services for our client agencies and independent, accountable oversight that protects the due process rights of our employees. Thank you for this opportunity and I stand prepared to answer any questions that you might have.