



***BROWARD COUNTY PBA
DAILY CLIPS***

June 22, 2017

MEDIA OUTLET: Sun Sentinel

HEADLINE: Pembroke Pines cuts in half its teacher salary hike offer

BYLINE: Caitlin Randle

LINK: <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/education/fl-sb-pembroke-teacher-salaries-20170609-story.html>

STORY: Pembroke Pines has cut the size of raises it is offering teachers at its A-rated, city-run charter schools.

After offering each teacher an extra \$1,000 on June 5, the city cut its offer Wednesday to a \$500 annual raise.

“To reduce your proposal is an insult to the teachers,” said Kathleen Phillips, of the Broward Teachers Union, to a round of applause from teachers, parents and students.

The teachers were asking for a \$3,000 raise; the Broward school district gave most of its teachers \$2,000. The starting salary for a district teacher is \$40,700, while the charter school’s salaries start at about \$39,000.

The two sides will meet again on July 12. Union president Anna Fusco said if the two sides don’t see eye-to-eye soon, they’ll reach an impasse.

Last week, Gov. Rick Scott signed a K-12 public education bill that will give charter schools in Broward County an extra \$12.7 million this year. But that won’t affect current negotiations, which are for the 2016-2017 school year ending this month.

Fusco told the charter school teachers at Wednesday’s meeting that the Broward County School District would be hosting a career fair in July to try to get them to switch to the public school system.

“I know a lot of teachers have already left or are thinking about leaving,” she said.

MEDIA OUTLET: Sun Sentinel

HEADLINE: Another leak causes more damage at new Broward courthouse

BYLINE: Larry Barszewski

LINK: <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fl-sb-broward-courthouse-new-leaks-20170621-story.html>

STORY: Broward County's new courthouse sprung another leak this week, the latest in a series of problems that have beset the \$197 million building since it opened in January.

One criminal court judge was forced to move to another courtroom while repairs are made after a loose-fitting pipe on the seventh floor caused water damage on several lower floors.

The new damage followed leaks earlier this month on the 20-story courthouse's uppermost floors, when water came in through poorly sealed windows and walls that were being lashed by heavy rains.

The courthouse also had water damage that had to be fixed and mold removed while it was under construction.

There's not anything unusual about the problems that have surfaced recently in the downtown Fort Lauderdale structure that opened about 18 months behind schedule, county officials said.

"As with any construction, it is not uncommon for the need to repair some issues that arise," Assistant County Administrator Alphonso Jefferson said Wednesday. All the problems so far have been under warranty and are being repaired at no additional cost to the county, he said.

Crews have worked quickly to keep any mold from forming, he said.

During construction, contractor James Cummings Inc. had to repair damaged interior materials and remove mold following a June 2014 rainstorm. Later, an undetected overflowing toilet damaged ceilings, carpets, tiles and walls on three floors and led to more mold that had to be removed. The courthouse also had problems with condensation in air-conditioning closets that dripped into drywall and caused microbial contamination.

Tuesday morning's water leak was caused by a loose compression fitting coupled to an air conditioning unit, Jefferson said.

State Attorney's Office spokesman Ron Ishoy said the leak affected the break room and several interview rooms on the seventh floor. An electronic back-up device, some carpeting and flooring needed to be replaced, along with some electrical outlets and light switches, Ishoy said.

On the fifth floor, water flowing from the leak got into Judge Christopher Pole's courtroom.

"The courtroom next to me was vacant, so I just moved into there," Pole said. "I should be back in my room in a week or two."

Mayor Barbara Sharief said the recent incidents were minor problems.

"This is all part of opening a new courthouse and acclimating to the number of people we have going through there," Sharief said.

Since the courthouse opened, there have been ongoing concerns about the tower's eight elevators and the time it takes to get on one during peak morning and lunchtime operating periods, Court Administrator Kathleen Pugh said.

But Jefferson said adjustments have been made.

The average wait time for an elevator has dropped from 67 seconds to 27 seconds, with the longest wait dropping from almost four minutes to just under two minutes, Jefferson said. During busy periods, the Otis elevators can be full and people have to wait to get on one.

Truly Burton, executive vice president of the Builders Association of South Florida, said new buildings are like living creatures that need to adapt.

"It's not just a box," Burton said. "It might need a series of adjustments to be working optimally."

MEDIA OUTLET: Florida Bulldog

HEADLINE: Using ethics loophole, Sen. Lauren Book votes to give her nonprofit \$1.5 million

BYLINE: Francisco Alvarado

LINK: <http://www.floridabulldog.org/2017/06/using-ethics-loophole-sen-book-votes-to-give-her-nonprofit-1-5-million/>

STORY: Broward State Sen. Lauren Book voted “yes” last month to approve a state appropriations bill that included \$1.5 million for Lauren’s Kids, the nonprofit she founded and leads as its \$135,000-a-year chief executive officer.

A gaping loophole in Florida Senate ethics rules allowed Book to cast her vote despite her apparent conflict of interest. The same loophole also meant she didn’t have to disclose her conflict publicly.

Senators are forbidden by ethics rules from voting “on any matter” in which they or an immediate family member would privately gain – except when it comes to votes on the annual General Appropriations Act. Abstaining senators must also disclose the nature of their interest in the matter, according to the 335-page Florida Senate Rules and Manual.

“Legislators are allowed to vote on issues that may benefit their profession,” said Ben Wilcox, research director for the nonpartisan watchdog Integrity Florida. “But it becomes questionable when it is a direct appropriation to an entity that a legislator controls and that would directly benefit that legislator.”

Lauren’s Kids, whose chairman is prominent lobbyist Ron Book, the senator’s father, has in a just few years become one of the Florida Legislature’s most favored private charities. Since 2012, Lauren’s Kids has bagged more than \$10 million in taxpayer-funded handouts.

Gov. Rick Scott went along with the latest \$1.5 million appropriation for Lauren’s Kids while approving Florida’s \$83 billion 2017-18 budget earlier this month.

How that appropriation came to be is a story itself. Lauren’s Kids only asked for \$1 million.

Where did extra \$500,000 come from?

But more than six weeks after the Florida legislative session ended, nobody is answering questions about how Lauren’s Kids snagged that additional \$500,000. Not Sen. Book. Not Ron Book. Not Sen. Bill Montford, the Tallahassee Democrat who sits on the education appropriations subcommittee and sponsored a funding request for \$1 million on the nonprofit’s behalf on Feb. 22. And not Rep. Jeanette Nunez, R-Kendall, who sponsored the bill in the House. Each did not respond to detailed requests for comment.

Lauren’s Kids spokeswoman Claire VanSusteren, however, provided a written statement on June 12 summarizing how Lauren’s Kids intends to use the funds and defending the organization’s mission to increase reporting of child sex–abuse incidents.

“There is no investment greater than in our children’s safety, and research shows that school-based education is an extremely effective vehicle for prevention and early intervention,” the statement read.

“Lauren’s Kids is proud to partner with Florida educators to help arm students with knowledge about personal safety and accessing help.”

VanSusteren did not respond to a follow-up list of questions emailed on June 15 that again requested an explanation of how Lauren’s Kids’ funding request got bumped up from \$1 million to \$1.5 million between April 27 and May 8. That’s when House and Senate members went into conference committees to hash out the final budget bill. Sen. Book was a conferee for the appropriations conference committee on health care and human services. Montford was a conferee on the committee for education.

Wilcox said Sen. Book should be forthcoming about the additional \$500,000 Lauren’s Kids received. “At the very least, she should be as transparent as possible on how that funding was decided,” he said. “It already doesn’t look good to the public given it is a dicey relationship for her in the first place as a sitting legislator who is also a recipient of taxpayer dollars.”

Lauren Book, 32, is a freshman legislator from Plantation. She assumed office just seven months ago after running unopposed and has quickly ascended the state’s political ranks. She is the Democratic Leader Pro Tempore and chairwoman of the Senate environmental preservation and conservation committee. She also sits on the appropriations, health policy and rules committees. Her father’s clients contributed significantly to her campaign and political action committee.

In March, Sen. Book told Florida Bulldog she was advised by Senate counsel “that it is proper that I do not abstain on these matters unless the funding directly inures to my benefit, which it will not.” Sen. Book, who was sexually abused by her nanny in her early teens, said she resigned from the board of directors of the foundation that raises money for Lauren’s Kids and that her salary was restructured to “ensure that no public dollars were used to compensate me for my work.”

At the time, Sen. Book said the Florida Department of Education requested that the Legislature provide \$1 million in funding for Lauren’s Kids to continue its “Safer, Smarter” curriculum, a program that teaches students, teachers and parents how to spot signs of child sex abuse and the importance of reporting sex crimes against children.

The curriculum is made available to children at all grade levels in public and charter schools in all 67 Florida counties, but school districts are not required to teach it. For instance, Indian River County Public Schools and Orange County Public Schools do not use the “Safer, Smarter” curriculum, according to spokespersons for both districts. Miami-Dade Public Schools, the largest school district in the state, uses “Safer, Smarter” at only 80 out of 392 schools, said spokesman John Schuster.

“The curriculum is implemented as classroom guidance lessons facilitated by the school counselor or school social worker,” Schuster said. “The counseling professionals choose the classes where the students will receive the curriculum.”

Data lacking on curriculum results

Schuster said Miami-Dade Public Schools does not track or have any data confirming that the “Safer, Smarter” curriculum has resulted in the reporting of child sex-abuse incidents that would otherwise go undetected. “These reports are made directly to the Department of Children and Families and are anonymous,” he said. “We have no access to this reporting information.”

In VanSusteren's June 12 statement, she defended Lauren's Kids work by citing an unverified and questionable 2015 poll the organization commissioned that concluded one in three girls and one in five boys will be victims of sexual abuse by the time they graduate 12th grade. By applying those statistics to the overall public schools student population in Florida, there are "at least 540,000 child victims currently enrolled Florida's K-12 schools," the statement read.

VanSusteren insisted 95 percent of child sex abuse is preventable through education and awareness, and that the "Safer, Smarter" curriculum works. "Students who receive education about personal safety and accessing help in unsafe situations are three times more likely to speak up if they are being harmed," VanSusteren said. "The funds allocated to Lauren's Kids during fiscal year 2017-2018 will be used to continue our work to bring life-saving resources to Florida classrooms – as recommended in the Department of Education budget, as well as the Governor's budget."

However, the Florida Department of Education did not make the funding request for the curriculum, said department press secretary Audrey Walden. She explained the Legislature and the governor must first approve the funding and the department then disperses the funds to Lauren's Kids and other nonprofit groups that get state money. Organizations must apply to the department and provide a breakdown on how the funds will be spent.

In its March 31 application, Lauren's Kids stated it would spend \$800,000 to print and distribute educational materials and maintain two websites associated with the "Safer, Smarter" curriculum; \$100,000 to produce a digital conference; and two separate \$50,000 expenditures for an evaluation survey, online training modules for teachers and principals and an educational fair.

"Please note that the department does not require schools to use the curriculum referenced," Walden said. "It is implemented in schools at the discretion of each school district."

According to an online legislative database used to track the Lauren's Kids appropriation, Sen. Montford sponsored a \$1 million funding request the same day that Kelly Mallette, governmental affairs director for Ronald L. Book P.A., lobbied the subcommittee on behalf of Lauren's Kids and three other nonprofits the firm represents.

Montford, who is also the chief executive of the Florida Association of District School Superintendents, has sponsored previous funding requests for Lauren's Kids. He sits on the appropriations, health policy and rules committees alongside Sen. Book.

According to Montford's 2016 campaign finance reports, Ron Book, his wife Patricia and his law firm each gave \$1,000 to the senator's re-election effort. Ronald L. Book P.A. also contributed \$2,500 in 2014 to a now-defunct political action committee chaired by Montford.

On the House side, the re-election campaign of Rep. Nunez, who sponsored a \$1 million funding bill on behalf of Lauren's Kids, also got \$1,000 contributions from Ron Book, his wife and his law firm. Montford and Nunez did not respond to four messages left with their legislative assistants the week of the June 5-9 special session.

MEDIA OUTLET: FOX Miami (Channel 7)

HEADLINE: North Miami police chief speaks out against department for resignation ultimatum

BYLINE: Rosh Lowe

LINK: <http://wsvn.com/news/local/north-miami-police-chief-hopes-to-sue-department-for-resignation-ultimatum/>

STORY: NORTH MIAMI, FLA. (WSVN) - North Miami's police chief claimed the department gave him an ultimatum to resign or be fired, and now he wants to sue.

North Miami Police Chief Gary Eugene said he was given a choice to either resign or be fired from the department by July 7.

"I like to be able to look at myself in the mirror every night, every morning to stand up for the right thing," he said. "It is the saddest part of the whole incident, is to find out that my daughter after reading everything they were saying about me, she spent her night crying in her bedroom."

Eugene's daughter, Gerthy, said the whole incident is upsetting. "It just hurts," she said. "It hurts to see him being targeted. It hurts to see him being used as a scapegoat."

Related: North Miami Police chief placed on leave amid fallout from shooting

In July 2016, Eugene was sworn in as North Miami police chief. Six days later, one of his officers, Jonathan Aledda, shot unarmed behavioral therapist Charles Kinsey on July 18.

Last week, Eugene was on medical leave and on the day prior to his return, Cmdr. Emile Hollant who was on the scene of the shooting, was fired. Hollant was cleared by the Miami-Dade State Attorney's Office after some within the department said he gave conflicting statements about witnessing the shooting.

"If he's guilty, I would be the first one to chop his head," Eugene said, "but there was no proof that he lied."

When Eugene returned to work, he was given the ultimatum and believes it is because he supported Hollant.

"I will not allow anyone to try to destroy my reputation," he said.

Eugene hired an attorney to sue the department for wrongful termination.

"It just doesn't make sense," said Attorney Brian Pollock. "We're looking into a couple theories as to whether Chief Eugene was retaliated against for complaining about this and blowing the whistle on not following the rules or whether this was racially motivated because the only two officers who have been disciplined by the department were Haitian-Americans."

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Wednesday was the first time Eugene spoke on camera since he was given the ultimatum.

A community meeting is set to take place Wednesday around 6 p.m. in North Miami to discuss the police department ordeal.

MEDIA OUTLET: ABC Miami (Channel 10)

HEADLINE: North Miami officials defend decision to fire police chief

BYLINE: Christian De La Rosa

LINK: <https://www.local10.com/news/florida/north-miami/north-miami-discuss-police-chief-forced-out-over-charles-kinsey-shooting>

STORY: NORTH MIAMI, Fla. - North Miami leaders defended their decision to fire police Chief Gary Eugene during a meeting held Wednesday night.

But some at the meeting weren't buying their reasoning.

"As a resident of North Miami, I don't trust you anymore," a resident said.

That feeling was echoed by a majority of people who attended the meeting.

Officials played audio recordings they said serve as evidence that the chief of the North Miami Police Department lied and gave contradicting statements when detectives interviewed him regarding his handling of the Charles Kinsey shooting.

Cmdr. Emile Hollant was in charge of the scene when Kinsey, a behavioral therapist, was shot as he was on his back with his hands in the air. Sitting next to him was an autistic man, Arnaldo Rios, who was holding a toy truck.

Kinsey was shot by Officer Jonathon Aledda, who has since been charged with attempted manslaughter and culpable negligence.

Hollant originally told Eugene he hadn't witnessed the shooting.

An investigation later showed Hollant had been present "prior, during and after the shooting incident," according to city records.

"Evidence also suggests the chief may have colluded with one of the officers in question to circumvent the internal affairs investigation," City Manager Larry Spring said.

Eugene was at the meeting.

"I believe they're trying to create a side story," he said.

Eugene went on to say he is "definitely" considering legal action.

The city is set to fire Eugene on July 7 if he refuses to accept a severance package.

When asked if he's reconsidering his choice to fire Eugene, Spring said no.