



Putting Words into Action: Board Roles and Responsibilities in Practice

January 2019 MLTC

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Board Chair: Judge Wanda Smith • Executive Director: Tonya • Director of Programs: Tom

SCENARIO A

Judge Wanda Smith is the board chair of Community Action and has been a passionate supporter of the CAA for over 10 years. She is also an elected state Supreme Court judge. She is well-known for supporting programs that address barriers to re-entry for individuals with criminal records, and feels very strongly that the CAA should be a leader in providing services in this area. Judge Smith recently began pressuring her fellow CAA board members to act quickly to launch a new program to offer a variety of employment, housing, and counseling services for people getting ready to leave the local prison system. While the CAA has experience running job training programs and operates a few affordable housing units, it has never had a program targeting individuals recently released from prison.

QUESTION 1:

How should the board approach Judge Smith's proposal to launch these new programs?



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SCENARIO B

When Judge Smith feels that the board is dragging its feet, she decides to take matters into her own hands. As the board chair, she reasons that she has the authority to explore whether the CAA should launch the new programs. She meets with the CAA's Director of Programs as well as the Director of Planning to explore funding options. She identifies a few that appear promising and asks the staff members to start applying for funds. She also asks them to contact other organizations in the area that offer services to former inmates to explore potential partnerships or collaborations.

QUESTION 1:

Is Judge Smith's approach to launching these new programs appropriate? Why or why not?

Question 2:

Are any of the actions taken by Judge Smith positive/beneficial to CAA? If so, which ones?



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SCENARIO C

Executive Director Tonya is at her wits end with the board chair, Judge Smith. If Tonya hears one more word about ex-offender programs, she will scream! Tonya feels as if Judge Smith has tunnel vision with respect to ex-offenders and is disrupting board meetings with her incessant chatter about them. When Tonya discovers that Judge Smith has been asking staff to research and obtain funding for the program, she is livid. Tonya feels that the other board members as well as staff are too intimidated by Judge Smith to handle this situation properly.

QUESTION 1:

What advice do you have for Tonya?



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SCENARIO D

Tonya is realizing that Judge Smith is basically a freight train without brakes! Judge Smith was up for re-election in the Fall of 2018 and ex-offender re-entry programs were one of the main issues of her campaign. Upon further investigation, Tonya discovers that the executive committee of the board voted to launch the re-entry programs without discussing the decision with her or the rest of the board. Judge Smith, as board chair, signed a funding agreement on behalf of the CAA. Judge Smith ultimately wins her re-election campaign after touting her efforts to launch the CAA's re-entry program. Months later, Tonya discovers that her Director of Programs, Tom, had been assisting Judge Smith with her re-election campaign and using some of the CAA's program funds to help with campaign efforts.

A year and a half after receiving some initial funding for the re-entry program, it becomes clear to the board that the program is just too expensive to run. To make matters worse, the funding source has yet to receive any information about the impact of the programs, and is threatening to pull the plug. The CAA is locked into several five-year contracts for supplies and space to run the program, as they received discounts in exchange for entering into longer-term contracts.

QUESTION 1:

Did the board meet its fiduciary duties with respect to this program? Why or why not?

QUESTION 2:

Are there any actions the board could have taken to help protect the CAA from situations like this?