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Interim director appointed at Parma Public Housing Agency

Search Committee for permanent director composed of local housing experts

PARMA – Mayor Tim DeGeeter appointed the former director of the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority’s (CMHA) Housing Choice Program to serve as interim director of the Parma Public Housing Agency (PPHA).

Priscilla Pointer-Hicks will serve in that role until a permanent replacement is found for Lev Kulchytsky, who stepped down today. Kulchytsky’s resignation comes after allegations of theft involving a former employee and an administrative review by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The review was released today to the mayor and Parma’s Public Housing Board, whose members include the Parma City Council. The review was critical of lapses surrounding internal controls and some procurement procedures at the agency, but revealed the PPHA’s finances, overall, were sound.

DeGeeter requested the HUD administrative review soon after city and federal authorities began investigating an employee in September for an alleged theft of an undisclosed amount of money. That employee was fired shortly after the allegations surfaced. The criminal investigation is on-going and no details are being released at this time.

“I had serious concerns when allegations of theft initially surfaced,” DeGeeter said. “As a result, I requested HUD conduct a top-down review to determine whether the agency had any further program deficiencies in quality control and checks and balances that could negatively impact program performance and service delivery to our constituents. My confidence in the direction of the agency was further eroded after reading HUD’s assessment report.”

Said DeGeeter: “A change in leadership at the agency was necessary.”

As HUD began reviewing PPHA operations, DeGeeter also consulted with area housing experts to develop an action plan for the agency should changes become necessary.

During that process, DeGeeter met and talked with Pointer-Hicks, who served as director of the Housing Choice Program for CMHA – the seventh largest housing authority in the country – for 10 years before retiring in July. She worked for CMHA for 15 years and has an extensive housing background, having worked in the field in both the public and private sector for 20 years.

“Based on Pointer-Hicks’s qualifications and experience, we believe she will set the agency on the right path as she works closely with HUD to ensure personnel are well-trained, following best practices, and serving program participants effectively and efficiently,” he said.

The DeGeeter administration will conduct an extensive search for a permanent director. To aid in the search, DeGeeter has put together an informal search committee made up of area housing experts as well as Councilman Vito Dipierro, chairman of the Housing Board.

Those members of the committee include:

- **Mike Foley**, a former state representative who was just appointed as director of Cuyahoga County’s Department of Sustainability. Foley spent eight years in the Legislature before leaving because of term limits. Foley, who once served as executive director of the Cleveland Tenants Organization, made public housing one of his major focuses while in the Ohio General Assembly. He will serve as chairman of the search committee.
- **Pointer-Hicks** also will serve on the search committee while in her role as interim director.
- **Doug Shelby**, former Cleveland HUD Field Office Director who served in that role for 17 years. Shelby has 35 years of housing experience, including a stint as housing development director of the Georgia Housing and Finance Authority.

- **Phil Star**, former Executive in Residence at the Urban Center in Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs. He joined the Urban Center in 1988 after directing the Cleveland Tenants Organization for 10 years. Beyond research and writing on housing issues, Star's recent activities include chairing the Cuyahoga Affordable Housing Coalition and assisting Cleveland's implementation of the Code Enforcement Partnership program, among other things.
- **Peter Iskin**, former managing attorney of the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Housing Practice Group. He joined Legal Aid in 1973 and is author of the book, *Ohio Eviction and Landlord-Tenant Law*, the most comprehensive guide to Ohio housing law and relied upon by attorneys, magistrates, and judges throughout the state. He also served on the Board of Commissioners of the Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority from 1980-1985 and was chair from 1981-1985.
- **Vito Dipierro**, Parma Councilman who also serves as chairman of the Parma Housing Board.

"I appreciate the willingness of these committee members, with their vast housing experience and background, to help us conduct this extensive search," DeGeeter said. "With their help, we will find a permanent director who is committed to safeguarding federal funds and carrying out the department's mission of providing the best possible service to individuals and families."

Said DeGeeter: "With the input and work of the search committee and of council members, and with the addition of Priscilla Pointer-Hicks, we have an action plan to ensure the agency is moving in the right direction."