



Joint Pension Board
Wednesday, July 19, 2023
1:00 p.m.
269 Melrose Street, Providence
Transportation Board Room

Members Present: Normand Benoit; Steven Sousa; Kathy Nadeau; Walter Melillo; and Lisa Hanson

Absent Members: Christopher Durand

Also Present: Scott Avedisian, CEO; Maureen Ruzzano, Human Resource Chief Compliance Officer; Courtney Marciano, Director of Media and Executive Communications; Jamie Pereira, Chief of Security; and Edward Pare, III, Esq., Board Counsel.

Call to order: Mr. Sousa called the meeting to order at 1:00p.m., indicating that a quorum was present.

Agenda Item 1: **Approval of June 21, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Benoit points out two (2) edits to be made to the minutes.

Ms. Nadeau makes a motion to approve the revised minutes of the June 21, 2023, meeting. Ms. Benoit seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Durand; Mr. Sousa; and Ms. Hanson.

Agenda Item 2: **Public Comment**

1. Mickeda Barnes:

- Ms. Barnes begins with presenting her pension benefits documentation to the JPB. Ms. Barnes expresses that she believes her pension benefits are long overdue. She believes that she should have been receiving her benefits since the time of her illegal termination from RIPTA.
- Ms. Barnes expresses that she reviewed documentation from her former attorney, Stephen Dennis, that she came across paperwork that was submitted to EEOC when she was denied her return to back to work date on or around August 7th. She expresses that she tried to get a reinstatement and that was also denied. She then expresses she realized after reading through the paperwork that she had resigned. The letter she found was being sent to a Marlene Toribio. It was

stamped on September 10, 2015, to the Rhode Island Commission of Human Rights.

- After that, there was an additional plaintiffs complaint on October 18, 2015. Ms. Barnes expresses she believes that it was given as an example following a meeting sometime between September 16 and October 18.
- Ms. Barnes continues that it was stated that she had resigned from RIPTA because of, “hurtful, personal attacks. That she should keep her mouth shut because this is a good job with good pay, or that she could get a job at Burger King if you don’t stop complaining. Or you can stay home and watch your kids.” Ms. Barnes states that those comments were made between Kathy Nadeau (Chief of Human Resources for RIPTA) and Thomas Cute (ATU Union President).
- Ms. Barnes continues that RIPTA and Beacon Mutual hid the extent of her injuries from her. She states that she did not know the extent of her injuries until she came across medical files from her former attorney Stephen Dennis. Ms. Barnes states that the medical files date back to 2008 when she was first assaulted on a city bus. She continues that she was distraught over the findings and expresses how unfair it was for her to wait 15 years to know the extent of her injuries.
- Ms. Barnes continues that she thought she was receiving “trigger point injections” but that her medical records indicate that she was receiving “optical nerve blocks.”
- Mr. Sousa, JPB Chairman, addresses Ms. Barnes regarding her medical documents and other supportive documents she may have. He advises her to submit a letter of her request along with her documentation and that the Board of Directors will review the findings and give her a written decision regarding her pension. Mr. Sousa reminds Ms. Barnes that public comment is limited to three (3) minutes and that during the hearing she will be able to provide all the documents and findings with no time limits.
- Ms. Barnes asks Mr. Benoit if he has anything to add. Mr. Benoit reiterates that she needs to submit a letter requesting an appeal hearing. During that hearing Ms. Barnes would not be time limited.
- Ms. Barnes continues that she feels that her rights have been violated. When she worked for RIPTA her rights were violated. She states that she was sexually harassed and that it went uninvestigated. She also claims that her medical condition was covered up and kept from her.
- Ms. Barnes states that she does not want to wait until she is 55 or 65 to be able to collect her pension.
- Ms. Barnes re-states that she submitted her resignation on October 18, 2015, but that RIPTA terminated her on February 15, 2016, without her knowledge.
- Ms. Barnes verbally requests a full investigation.
- Ms. Barnes says she is “done with it” and every person on the committee will be exposed. She continues that the committee’s time is over hiding and covering up what truly happened.

2. Bella Noka:

- Ms. Noka states that she is a Narragansett Tribal elder and is attending the Joint

Pension Board meeting to help support Ms. Barnes.

- Ms. Noka continues that she is disappointed in the lack of diversity of the Joint Pension Board. She is saddened to see no diversity within the committee and asks that we consider making it more diverse.
- Ms. Noka states that she reviewed all of the material Ms. Barnes provided and that in her opinion someone did keep a lot of that information from her. Ms. Noka states that it was RIPTA's responsibility to reach out to Ms. Barnes, not the other way around.
- Ms. Noka continues that it may have been impossible for Ms. Barnes to retain dates and times due to her brain injury and that if RIPTA knew about the traumatic brain injury it was the Agency's responsibility to help Ms. Barnes. She alleges that the documentation Ms. Barnes has provided to the committee is proof from doctors and other medical providers that she suffered a significant injury.
- Ms. Noka believes that RIPTA is dealing with somebody who was injured on the job and that the Agency needed to find Ms. Barnes and advocate to help her. She again alleges that RIPTA purposely kept Ms. Barnes' medical evaluation from her.
- Ms. Noka asks the Board to not be afraid to do the right thing. She asks the Board to not be afraid to stand up and advocate on Ms. Barnes' behalf. She states that in this day and age with social media, everyone can now be exposed for their behavior and decisions they make. Ms. Noka states that she has written down all the names of the Joint Pension Board members and plans to expose them for "who they really are" on her social media page(s).

3. Anita Bruno:

- Ms. Bruno states that she is there to represent Ms. Barnes after meeting her today.
- She states that she is disappointed at the lack of the representation Ms. Barnes has been given up to this point. She states that as a former union member Ms. Barnes should have had the weight of the union behind her.
- Ms. Bruno states that she hopes Ms. Nadeau is keeping good, detailed minutes of the meeting because she will be requesting a copy.
- Ms. Bruno states that she does not like that RIDOT has pushed themselves into RIPTA. She addresses Mr. Avedisian saying that she wants to support him and his mission as CEO, but also feels that RIPTA fell short protecting Ms. Barnes when she needed it most.
- Ms. Bruno asks for a due diligent investigation to occur and when it reveals that Ms. Barnes should be entitled to her pension that she also gets all the money that was owed to her for all of the years that she has been out of work.
- Ms. Bruno states that she hopes and wants to see RIPTA do better in the future.

Agenda Item 3:

Convene as Pension Benefit Sub-Committee

- Ms. Ruzzano presents the pension application for Naomi Deasley, Bus Operator. Ms. Deasley requested her Early Pension become effective on August 1, 2023, in the amount of \$2,591.76 per month.

Mr. Melillo makes a motion to approve the pension benefits request. Mr. Benoit seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Ms. Nadeau; Mr. Sousa; and Ms. Hanson.

- Ms. Ruzzano presents the pension application for Eleuterio Torti, Bus Operator. Mr. Torti requested his Late Pension become effective on August 1, 2023, in the amount of \$2,450.01 per month.

Ms. Nadeau makes a motion to approve the pension benefits request. Mr. Melillo seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Benoit; Mr. Sousa; and Ms. Hanson.

- Ms. Ruzzano presents the pension application for Michael McKiernan, Bus Operator. Mr. McKiernan requested his Late Pension become effective on August 1, 2023, in the amount of \$2,765.65 per month.

Mr. Melillo makes a motion to approve the pension benefits request. Mr. Benoit seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Ms. Nadeau; Mr. Sousa; and Ms. Hanson.

- Ms. Ruzzano presents the pension application for Nicholas DeCristofaro, Bus Operator. Mr. DeCristofaro requested his Late Pension become effective on August 1, 2023, in the amount of \$6,833.52 per month.

Mr. Melillo makes a motion to approve the pension benefits request. Ms. Nadeau seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Mr. Benoit; Mr. Sousa; and Ms. Hanson.

Adjournment – 1:26 p.m.

Mr. Benoit makes a motion to adjourn. Mr. Durand seconds, and the motion passes with favorable votes by Ms. Nadeau; Mr. Sousa; and Ms. Hanson.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Nadeau, Recording Secretary