



October 5, 2018

Via E-mail

Barry H. Ostrowsky
President & Chief Executive Officer
RWJBarnabas Health
Barry.Ostrowsky@rwjbh.org

RWJBarnabas Health
Attn: Board of Trustees

Dear Mr. Ostrowsky and Members of the Board of Trustees:

I am Dara Aquila Govan, President of the Garden State Bar Association (the "Association"), the largest professional association of African-American attorneys, judges and law students in New Jersey. The Association writes to you in support of Michellene Davis, Executive Vice-President and Chief Corporate Affairs Officer at RWJBarnabas Health. We recently learned that RWJBarnabas Health has placed Ms. Davis on administrative leave after learning of a comment she posted from her personal Facebook account in response to a news article. The article discussed a plan to place armed law enforcement officers in schools in Fair Lawn, New Jersey. Ms. Davis responded by posing the question "who's going to train them so they don't shoot black children first?"

The Association understands that Ms. Davis' question could be perceived as jarring and off-putting to people unfamiliar with, and insensitive to, the historically challenging relationship between law enforcement and communities of color. We also know that the question she posed is one that is discussed in African-American homes, churches and social organizations when the topic is raised of having armed police around our children. The question was in no way racist, but was a reflection of the legitimate fear born of the complex history of the relationship between law enforcement and communities of color. Ms. Davis' question was not a pronouncement against the police or a suggestion that they were racist. But it spoke to the larger issue that the history of the relationship between communities of color and law enforcement must be among the many factors that are contemplated and discussed when making the controversial decision to introduce armed law enforcement officers into schools.

The Association believes that Ms. Davis' question and the varied reactions and responses to it, serve as an opportunity to open the dialogue of how best to serve all children and protect them against violence in schools. RWJBarnabas has been at the forefront of the discussion of violence as a public health issue, and has actively



participated in discussions on the companion issue of conscious and unconscious bias, including as it relates to the police. As a representative of RWJBarnabas Health, Ms. Davis has been instrumental in recasting violence as a health issue so that it can be addressed appropriately and holistically. She has represented RWJBarnabas extraordinarily well as a speaker on various panels and in television interviews discussing unconscious and conscious bias in the police force. The Association has been encouraged by the fact that RWJBarnabas Health has understood the importance of participating in this dialogue in order to move our communities forward.

This is why the Association was disappointed to learn that RWJBarnabas Health decided to place Ms. Davis on administrative leave in response to this matter. Ms. Davis has served as a change agent on these and so many other important issues. Her career as a public servant and corporate leader is characterized primarily by her uncanny ability to bridge gaps and build consensus among people from “both sides of the aisle,” and her willingness to address difficult issues. Ms. Davis’ private expression of concern over a controversial issue does not merit any further penalty or adverse employment action. The Association asks that RWJBarnabas Health reconsider its decision, and that it restore Ms. Davis’ employment status immediately.

As the largest African-American bar association in the state, the Association seeks to, among other things, address issues like these, that intersect with race and the law. We view this moment as an opportunity for RWJBarnabas Health to continue this difficult, but necessary dialogue concerning violence as a public health issue and police-community relations. And we believe that Ms. Davis’ service to RWJBarnabas Health and her long-standing service to the state and to the corporate community should not be defined by this moment. In conclusion, we fully support Ms. Davis and we ask that you reinstate her employment status immediately.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Dara Aquila Govan".

Dara Aquila Govan
President