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College fires NE president

Source: Appeals to board, EEOC have been filed

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Kenya Ayers-Palmore said she was fired from her job as former NE Campus president and is fighting back.

“I am in the process of addressing the actions taken to remove me from leadership and cannot say more at this time,” Ayers-Palmore said in a statement to The Collegian.

A source familiar with the situation explained the former president’s termination Oct. 27 did not follow due process. Ayers-Palmore filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, received Nov. 4 and filed an appeal with the board of trustees Nov. 9, the source said.

“She will defend her right, she will engage legal counsel because she has to have it for the formal appeal that the [college] offers,” the source said. “And then for any litigation, she will exhaust all of her administrative remedies.”

Reginald Gates, vice chancellor of communications and external affairs, said the college cannot comment on personnel matters.

In June, Ayers-Palmore was evaluated and received a positive rating, the source said. In the termination letter served to her, however, the source said it detailed Ayers-Palmore’s failure to follow the chancellor’s orders, though this was not mentioned in the evaluation.

At the time of her dismissal, Ayers-Palmore did not have a contract with the



File photo/The Collegian

Kenya Ayers-Palmore talks to a faculty member during the Welcome Week event on NE Campus in August. Ayers-Palmore was fired as NE president Oct. 27.

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My mission as an educator is to build the next generation of leaders who lead authentically and guide our organization to greater peace, wisdom and justice.”
- Kenya Ayers-Palmore

college, even though she repeatedly asked for one, according to the source. This was used against her in the termination letter.

“She kept asking for it and was told and assured she would get one,” the source said. “There was no reason why she would think she wouldn’t get one, but she never got one.”

In Ayers-Palmore’s statement, she explains that she hoped to lead NE Campus to success for not just the employees, but

students as well.

“I looked forward to doing so much longer to grow our beloved NE Campus in alignment with the greater College goals,” she said. “Unfortunately, that work has now been cut short.”

Ayers-Palmore started as president in July 2019. Prior to TCC, she was the vice president and chair of the board for Northwest Educational Council for Student

Success in Arlington Heights, Illinois.

NE Campus employees were notified at 11:33 a.m. Oct. 30 through an email from Chancellor Elva LeBlanc that Ayers-Palmore was no longer serving as president.

Jan Clayton, who had been NW vice president of student affairs, was named interim president.

Students did not receive notification of her leave, however, and some found out that same day attending the Student Empowerment Forum with the President event at 12:30 p.m. They were confused to find she was not there.

The announcement email explained that the search for the NE Campus president is to happen immediately. Listings for the position were put out on The Chronicle of Higher Education and TCC’s job listing website Nov. 3.

“I am confident that with your support and that of all the faculty and staff, we will continue to move forward in service to our students and community,” LeBlanc said in the email.

Ayers-Palmore said that she was honored to serve the college despite her abrupt exit and encouraged the campus community to persevere.

“I will learn and grow from this experience,” she said in the statement. “My mission as an educator is to build the next generation of leaders who lead authentically and guide our organization to greater peace, wisdom and justice. I trust that you will pick up the mantle from here.”

ONLINE

Read Ayers-Palmore’s full letter to The Collegian at:

collegian.tccd.edu

DISTRICT

Former VP appeals retaliation lawsuit

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TCC’s former vice president for development plans to appeal her lawsuits against the college that led to the departure of former Chancellor Eugene Giovannini in 2022.

Kristin Bennett asked the court Oct. 16 to dismiss her Title VII retaliation claim, according to the case document. The court agreed Nov. 1.

Nine other claims by Bennett were previously dismissed by the court. Nothing has been filed since, but she has several more weeks to file.

The appeal, once filed, will be heard by the federal Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans, according to TCC’s general counsel Carol Bracken.

The Title VII retaliation claim was the final claim, and Bracken said TCC was well-prepared and ready for the trial Oct. 31.

However, a few days before, Bennett’s attorney, Frank Hill, filed a motion to dismiss the last remaining claim, and Judge Jane Boyle granted his request.

The dismissal was made “with prejudice,” meaning Bennett will not be able to appeal that claim in the future.

Hill explained that the main charge among the nine remaining claims is that Bennett had the right to a due process hearing, but it was refused.

“It’s been a phenomenal thing that the district has always resisted giving constitutional due process over these years, and I

do not know what the root of that mindset is,” he said

Hill has not just represented Bennett, but many former TCC employees as well. He said they all relate in a major way.

“Most of the cases centered around the refusal to give due process,” he said.

He believes there are various reasons why the former employees he has represented are fighting for due process.

He says it seems like a mindset TCC has to move for quick termination.

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Frank Hill
Attorney for former Vice President Kristin Bennett

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“In the Tarrant County College District, there has been a long mindset that the employment human relations concept is that it’s us against them,” he said. “It’s the administration against faculty and against employees. And if there’s the slightest evidence that the faculty person did something wrong, the Tarrant County College mentality is, ‘Let’s jump on it.’”

SOUTHEAST

‘Dead Man’s Cell Phone’ production dials up story of missed connections

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SE theater department sees dead people. They play them too.

The play “Dead Man’s Cell Phone” will open from Nov. 15-17. It centers on Jean, played by SE student Isara Al-Hilo, dealing with the aftermath of discovering a dead man next to her.

“A man dies. But his phone continues to ring,” Director Drew Hampton said. “Does that keep him alive? And what zany realities might it create for those that truly are living?”

The play had several pull-factors for Hampton that led him to select it.

“It checks a lot of boxes for us: cast-able with our students, appropriately challenging and timely themes to name a few,” Hampton said. “It’s also a pleasantly quirky show I’ve had on my ‘want to direct’ list for a while.”

In their past productions, certain plays would demand actors to take several parts.

Having a larger cast for “Dead Man’s Cellphone” eliminates the struggle of switching between roles, but SE student Haleigh Ferguson acknowledged there are still struggles.

“[Al-Hilo] has a lot of dialogue with different people,” Ferguson said. “I know that can be difficult knowing how to talk to different characters.”

Hampton looks forward to the audience seeing the visuals of the show.

“More than most shows I’ve directed, this is a fairly busy and



Alex Hoben/The Collegian

SE students Haleigh Ferguson and Isara Al-Hilo act on stage during rehearsals for “Dead Man’s Cell Phone.” The play opens Nov. 15.

creative technical production,” Hampton said. “With all the spectacle we have in store, this may be one of the most visually memorable productions our department has created.”

SE student Angelica Valdez stepped out of her comfort zone to play Hermia, the dead man’s widow.

“Compared to the other characters, she’s very loud. She’s very prideful. She cares a lot about herself,” she said. “I’m a very shy person. I’m not whisper-loud but I’m very low-toned so this character was kind of hard for me.”

“Dead Man’s Cell Phone” is the first play Valdez acted in. She

was in two of Hampton’s classes and he says has enjoyed watching her growth as an actor.

“She’s always been talented and focused, and it’s been lovely to see her confidence begin to catch up,” Hampton said.

It was difficult for Al-Hilo to sum up the theme of the play in just one word. However, she hopes the audience can witness how each character moves through grief.

“There’s a lot of themes,” Al-Hilo said. “Grief in a way. It kind of takes the story of how each character goes through it, and Jean trying to make the best of all – trying to help them all with their own way of grieving.”