

12-7-15

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Office of the Governor  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, South Carolina 29201

Dear Governor Haley,

I am writing you because of extreme frustration with the state of South Carolina, and what I believe to be unfair hiring practices. I worked for the SCDC from 10/29/07 to 7/2/14 as a correctional officer. In 2011, I applied for a chaplain's position at Lieber Correctional where I served as a C/O. I was not interviewed. I was told at the time it was because I did not have a master's degree. Nonetheless, the agency hired a man, Eddie Morris, who also did not have a master's degree.

I did not protest what seemed like unfair treatment. After Morris was terminated for unethical behavior, I was authorized, after writing numerous letters and making repeated calls, to offer my help to assist the new chaplain, James Cuttino. He had been one of the candidates that Mr. Morris was chosen ahead of. Mr. Cuttino was later hired to assist Mr. Morris. I assisted Mr. Cuttino in the role of security for exactly one month. Chaplain Cuttino would tell you I was a tremendous help. Unfortunately I tripped over a mattress leaving work on April 30, 2013. I sustained a multiple fracture and could not work for 5 ½ months. When I was able to return in October, it was part-time for several months, but I could not renew my state weapons certification because my doctor felt the risk of re-injuring my shoulder was too great. As a result, my employment was terminated, although I was permitted to retire as I had worked for 6 ½ years. The state also gave me a \$60,000 settlement for 30% permanent disability in my right shoulder.

During my final two years of employment with SCDC I had earned a master's degree in psychology from Kaplan University. I felt well-qualified to apply for multiple positions listed on the State web-site. I applied for over 60 positions (with Corrections, Social Services, Mental Health, Juvenile Justice, and Vocational Rehabilitation) but never received an interview, despite an exemplary work record and a host of recommendations including several from supervisors and co-workers at Lieber.

After a few months of being ignored I called the office of the SCDC director Bryan Stirling to request an interview. I was told he would not be able to see me but I would be able to meet with one of his deputies. This meeting never took place in spite of numerous calls and letters from me. The agency simply dodged every inquiry and then pretended they had never said what they did. I moved on, although my wife who is a recently retired nurse encouraged me to write to you.

Recently the position of Associate Chaplain has been available at Lieber. After being forced to sit out for a year because of being a former employee, I have been volunteering at Lieber since May. I assist with the JumpStart program every Tuesday from 3:30-6:00. I also fill in for Chaplain Cuttino two Sundays every month, and I have filled in for him when he took a much needed vacation. Chaplain Cuttino urged me to apply for this position when it became available in August. I did but was not interviewed. Chaplain Cuttino says they had him interview two people. He did not think either one of them could do a good job.

Governor Haley, the SCDC can be very dogmatic about who is and who isn't qualified, but they have a history of hiring whoever they want, just as they hired Eddie Morris while disqualifying me for not having a master's degree. Now SCDC is doing more of their arbitrary discrimination. They say my master's degree doesn't meet their qualification since it is not a degree in theology. Chaplain Cuttino is frustrated that the person who has by far the best experience, temperament, and suitability for the job (me!) can't even get an interview. Governor Haley, you know what it feels like to be the best person for the job and be discounted for arbitrary reasons.

I do not want to rant or give a litany of SCDC's history of discrimination, particularly against older people. I simply hope you or someone from your office will care enough about my situation and about Chaplain Cuttino's sincere desire for me to work with him as a paid assistant. I honestly do not need the money, but there is something wrong about working hard for an agency that refuses to recognize or compensate me for my substantial contributions.

SCDC continues to bleed money because of an extremely high turn over rate. On several occasions I have approached SCDC about helping them to rectify this problem, but they refuse to even discuss it with me. I hope you will be more receptive.

Please let me know if you truly care about my situation. I am very optimistic that you do, that you will not follow the lead of SCDC and the state employment agency. I may be 66 years old, but I have enough ability, intelligence, and passion to make a real difference for many years to come. Don't you think I deserve that opportunity?

Very sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David Benrexi". The script is cursive and somewhat stylized, with the first name "David" being more prominent than the last name "Benrexi".

David Benrexi  
146 Paddock way  
Summerville, SC 29486  
843-814-2216