

ROBERT BURNS

NUMBER _____ DOCKET:

19TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT COURT

VERSUS

PARISH OF EAST BATON ROUGE

LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS OF
INTERIOR DESIGNERS, DEBORAH STEINMETZ, DR.
T. L. RITCHIE, ANDREA “DRU” LAMB, KAREN HAZEL,
JO ANN HYMEL, CAROLYN SAWYER,
MARION JOHNSTON

STATE OF LOUISIANA

PETITION FOR DAMAGES

NOW UNTO COURT comes Plaintiff, Robert Edwin Burns, in proper person,
who asserts the following:

1.

That he is of the full age of majority and resides in the Parish of East Baton
Rouge, State of Louisiana.

2.

Made Defendants in this petition for damages are:

LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS OF INTERIOR

DESIGNERS (IDB), an executive agency of the State of Louisiana and a body
corporate with the power to sue and be sued whose office at all times pertinent
herein is located in the Parish of East Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana, and whose
Chairman and representative for Service of Process is Ms. Deborah Steinmetz,
IDB Member and Chairman, 1507 Robert E Lee Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70122-
2139.

DEBORAH STEINMETZ, IDB Member and Chairman, a major resident and
domiciliary of the Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana.

DR. T. L. RITCHIE, IDB Member and Vice Chairman, a major resident and
domiciliary of the Parish of East Baton Rouge, State of Louisiana.

ANDREA MICHAEL “DRU” LAMB, IDB Member, a major resident and
domiciliary of the Parish of Orleans, State of Louisiana.

KAREN HAZEL, IDB Member, a major resident and domiciliary of the Parish
of Rapides, State of Louisiana.

MARION M. JOHNSTON, IDB Member, a major resident and domiciliary of
the Parish of Natchitoches, State of Louisiana.

CAROLYN SAWYER, IDB Member, a major resident and domiciliary of the Parish of Rapides, State of Louisiana.

JO ANN HYMEL, IDB Member, a major resident and domiciliary of the Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana.

3.

The IDB held a regularly-scheduled meeting on February 27, 2014.

4.

Plaintiff sought to be recognized to speak on the agenda item of the approval of minutes of the previous meeting conducted on December 13, 2013.

5.

Upon reluctantly granting Plaintiff recognition to speak, Plaintiff indicated that the meeting of February 27, 2014 was not posted as required on the LaTrac website.

6.

IDB Executive Director Sandy Edmonds angrily shouted to Plaintiff that she'd posted it at 12:15 p.m. the day before and was openly hostile toward Plaintiff indicating that she would never neglect to post the meeting knowing that Plaintiff would check the website to see that it was posted on time.

7.

After Ms. Edmonds completed her episode of literally shouting at Plaintiff, Board Member Karen Hazel relayed that there must have been some "technical issues" which caused the agenda not to appear on the LaTrac website.

8.

Plaintiff stated that those type problems seemed to happen "a good bit" regarding IDB meetings.

9.

Board Member Karen Hazel then inquired of Plaintiff, "Well, what else?"

10.

Plaintiff began a response to Ms. Hazel's inquiry by stating, "I would go back to November, 2011."

11.

Upon uttering the words “November, 2011,” Ms. Anna Dow, IDB legal counsel and against whom Plaintiff has a defamation lawsuit pending in 19th Judicial District Court (Docket # 603248 pending before Judge Caldwell) signaled to EBRP Sheriff Deputy Ronald Landry to have Plaintiff escorted out of the meeting facility.

12.

EBRP Deputy Ronald Landry escorted Plaintiff out of the meeting facility.

13.

No Defendant voiced any objection nor expressed any statement that, in tacitly approving Plaintiff’s escort from the meeting facility merely as a result of him answering a question posed by Board Member Karen Hazel, they were violating LA R. S. 42:14(D) by denying Plaintiff the right to address any other agenda items prior to votes being taken on the items. Defendants were also violating Article 12, Section 3 of Louisiana’s Constitution which states: “No person shall be denied the right to observe the deliberations of public bodies and examine public documents except in cases established by law.” Plaintiff uttering the words “November, 2011” provide no justification whatsoever by which Defendants can oust Plaintiff from the meeting and thereby deny Plaintiff his rights as clearly stated in Article 12, Section 3 of Louisiana’s Constitution.

14.

Defendants’ sensitivity to the words “November 2011” resulted from extensive efforts to conceal a clandestine meeting of the IDB conducted on November 17, 2011 during which the IDB sought to aid and abet its Executive Director, Ms. Sandy Edmonds, in her then four-year-old pattern of committing extensive payroll fraud within the agency.

15.

The totality of the secrecy of the November 17, 2011 meeting was the subject of an extensive complaint to Louisiana Attorney General James D. “Buddy” Caldwell’s Office. That complaint, which speaks for itself, is attached hereto and made a part hereof as Exhibit P-1. It entails the notification on LaTrac of “dummy meeting dates,” including December 8, 2011, multiple “cancellations” of meeting dates (October 20, 2011 and December 8, 2011) as well as a total failure to announce via LaTrac any notice whatsoever of a meeting on November 17, 2011 during which Ms. Edmonds’

“employment agreement” was added to the agenda in order that Defendants could readily aid and abet Ms. Edmonds’ extensive commission of payroll fraud with the IDB.

16.

A hard-copy screen save printout of Defendant IDB’s LaTrac “notices” page dated January 28, 2012, which is attached hereto and made a part hereof as Exhibit P-2, clearly shows that, as of January 28, 2012, a December 8, 2011 meeting remained on the LaTrac website as if it had taken place when it did not, yet the November 17, 2011 meeting, which **did** take place, remains absent from the schedule of meetings. This demonstrates the extent to which Defendants were determined to conceal their discussions of facilitating Ms. Edmonds’ payroll fraud. A public records request by Plaintiff on or around March 10, 2014 for the notice of cancellation of the December 8, 2011 meeting, which Plaintiff observed posted to the LaTrac website within hours of the “cancellation” of that “meeting” resulted in no indication by Defendant IDB that it continues to possess the document sought by Plaintiff. Further, despite wildly contradictory statements regarding whether or not security was present for the November 17, 2011 meeting, Defendant IDB responded to a public records request seeking evidence of payment for any alleged security for the November 17, 2011 clandestine meeting by stating, “no records exist.”

17.

Included in P-1 are sworn affidavits of Plaintiff, Ms. Sherrie Wilks, and Rev. Freddie Phillips. Beginning on the bottom of page two (2) of Plaintiff’s sworn affidavit, Plaintiff relays that Defendants consistently posted on LaTrac that their meeting of April 14, 2011 would be held at Board Member Jo Ann Hymel’s restaurant, Hymel’s in Convent, Louisiana, which is not even in East Baton Rouge Parish but rather in St. James Parish.

18.

That April 14, 2011 IDB meeting remained scheduled to transpire at Hymel’s right up to **the very morning of April 14, 2011!!!!** Just as Plaintiff and his mother were about to depart to travel to Hymel’s, Plaintiff opted to check LaTrac one last time, only to uncover that the meeting venue had been changed to Summa Court, the then-headquarters of Defendant IDB. Plaintiff informed Rev. Phillips of the last-second change in venue,

and he was able to attend the meeting after having previously said he could not with it being held in Convent. Plaintiff contends this deceit regarding the April 14, 2011 meeting was the beginning of a consistent pattern by Defendants to avoid public scrutiny of its meetings. Plaintiff asked for an explanation of the last-second venue change at the April 14, 2011 meeting, but the only response he got was from Board Member Jo Ann Hymel, who said, “Well, with everything going on, we just figured it would be better to hold it here.” Plaintiff then inquired, “and this decision was made literally hours ago?” to which he got no response from any Board Member!

19.

Given the totality of the deceit which Defendants have consistently engaged in to conceal its meetings, Plaintiff had every reason to be suspicious of the meeting of February 27, 2014 not being posted to LaTrac. Further, Defendants had no justification for ousting Plaintiff when he, upon being asked “what else?” by Board Member Karen Hazel, uttered the simple, but oh-so-sensitive, words “November, 2011.” Further, Defendants should have insisted that Ms. Dow, whom Plaintiff has a lawsuit against for defamation of his character, recuse herself from any decision regarding Plaintiff’s ability to observe the meeting. Instead, all members tacitly endorsed their attorney’s unjustified ouster of Plaintiff and, in so doing, violated LA R. S. 42:14 (D) as well as Article 12, Section 3 of the Louisiana Constitution.

20.

Ms. Edmonds is the wife of an Interior Designer, Matthew Edmonds. For the IDB to essentially provide the spouse of a competitor of its licensees with a lucrative job in which the Louisiana Inspector General, in a report released on December 9, 2013, indicated that Ms. Edmonds “often is paid for performing no public purpose” is unconscionable! To block Plaintiff’s efforts at exposing such corruption is equally unconscionable, and Defendants are liable for such efforts which they shuttered in fear of when he merely uttered the words “November, 2011.”

21.

By knowingly and willingly denying Plaintiff the right to speak on agenda items by unjustifiably ousting him from the meeting of February 27, 2014, Defendants Steinmetz, Ritchie, Hazel, Hymel, Johnston, Lamb, and Sawyer did knowingly and

willfully violate LA R. S. 42:14(D), which states: “Except school boards, which shall be subject to R.S. 42:15, each public body conducting a meeting which is subject to the notice requirements of R.S. 42:19(A) shall allow a public comment period at any point in the meeting prior to action on an agenda item upon which a vote is to be taken. The governing body may adopt reasonable rules and restrictions regarding such comment period.” Defendants further violated Article 12, Section 3 of Louisiana’s Constitution, which states: “No person shall be denied the right to observe the deliberations of public bodies and examine public documents except in cases established by law.”

22.

By their knowing and willful violations of LA R. S. 42:14(D) and pursuant to LA R. S. 42:28, each IDB Member named Defendant is **personally** liable unto Plaintiff for the amount of \$100 each. Further, Pursuant to R. S. 42:26(C), upon successful awarding of a Judgment of this Honorable Court in which such \$100 civil penalty is assessed against each Member and awarded to Plaintiff, Plaintiff is also entitled to reasonable attorney fees and the costs of this Petition.

23.

Pursuant to Case # 2008-CA-0952, Philip Courvelle and LA Recreational Vehicle Dealers Association, Inc. v. LA Recreational and Used Motor Vehicle Commission et. al., for which the First Circuit Court of Appeals overturned the civil penalties awarded by the 19th Judicial District Court imposed by Judge Morvant against that Commission’s Members as a result of the Plaintiff’s failure to name the Members of the Board individually as Defendants, Plaintiff has named each of the seven (7) Members of the IDB who knowingly and willfully violated LA R. S. 42:14(D) in denying Plaintiff’s right to speak on agenda items prior to votes on those items as a result of their unjustified ouster of him from the Board Meeting of February 27, 2014. Further, this Petition has been filed within the 60-day timeframe permitted by LA R. S. 42:28 for the imposition of Civil Penalties against the seven (7) named Defendant Members of the IDB.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, ROBERT EDWIN BURNS, prays that Defendants, LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINES OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS, DEBORAH STEINMETZ, DR. T. L. RITCHIE, KAREN HAZEL, JO ANN HYMEL, MARION JOHNSTON, ANDREA MICHAEL “DRU” LAMB, and CAROLYN

SAWYER be duly served with a copy of this petition, and cited to appear and answer same and, after all legal delays and due proceedings had, there be a judgment herein in favor of Plaintiff, ROBERT EDWIN BURNS, and against Defendants, LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINES OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS, DEBORAH STEINMETZ, DR. T. L. RITCHIE, KAREN HAZEL, JO ANN HYMEL, MARION JOHNSTON, ANDREA MICHAEL "DRU" LAMB, and CAROLYN SAWYER awarding him \$100 from each individually-named Defendant in Civil Penalties (except the IDB itself as the civil penalty is a personal liability) pursuant to LA R. S. 42:28 along with each named personal Defendant being assessed a one-seventh (1/7th) share of Defendants' court costs in initiating this Petition as provided for under LA R. S. 42:26(C).

Respectfully Submitted,

Robert Edwin Burns, in proper person
4155 Essen Lane, Ste 228
Baton Rouge, LA 70809-2152
(225) 636-5506 (home) (225) 235-4346
E-mail: Robert@AuctionSellsFast.com

PLEASE SERVE:

All individual Defendants are scheduled to be in attendance at an IDB meeting transpiring at 12:30 p.m. on Tuesday, April 29, 2014 at the following address:

**LOUISIANA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION
700 North 10th St
Baton Rouge, LA 70802**

Accordingly, please serve the following individuals mere minutes before 12:30 p.m. at the above-listed address where they will all be located in one of the facility's conference rooms:

**DEBORAH STEINMETZ, Chairman and Member, IDB
DR. T. L. RITCHIE, Member & Vice Chairman, IDB
KAREN HAZEL, Secretary-Treasurer and Member, IDB
JO ANN HYMEL, Member, IDB
MARION M. JOHNSTON, Member IDB
ANDREA MICHAEL "DRU" LAMB, Member, IDB
CAROLYN SNOW SAWYER, Member, IDB**

Service Instructions for Defendant IDB on next page.

Please withhold service for Defendant LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS until after April 29, 2014, after which service may be facilitated as indicated below:

LOUISIANA STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS OF INTERIOR DESIGNERS

James D. "Buddy" Caldwell, Attorney General, State of Louisiana
1885 N Third St
Baton Rouge LA 70802