

December 20, 2021

Dear DeKalb County Board Members and HUD officials,

Around July 2021, I became concerned about the Housing Authority County of DeKalb (HACD), so I started to use Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to obtain information. As I received information from HACD, I became concerned about its operation and compliance with various federal regulations and state statutes. For example, paying a commissioner a stipend violates a state statute – 310 ILCS 10. Other examples include: purchasing bottled water and Christmas cards with federal monies, allowing non-business travel expenses per IRS regulations (if the primary purpose of the travel is vacation based on the numbers of days spent on vacation in comparison to business), entertainment of board members at private Christmas dinners, etc. The first issue I want to raise with you is non-compliance with the Local Government Travel Expense Control Act (50 ILCS 150). As you are probably aware that the County Board appoints the commissioners on the HACD, I believe you need to be made aware of these issues. Also, much of the operating funds for HACD come from HUD., so I think HUD should be made aware of these issues, too. Unfortunately, I have raised these issues to the executive director and board of HACD, but you can see that they have mainly ignored these issues.

The County Board addressed the Local Government Travel Expense Control Act in the Finance Committee on March 1, 2017. The minutes for this meeting provide a good explanation of the changes required. The full board approved the changes on March 15, 2017, in Resolution R2017-069. The Local Government Travel Expense Control Act is not very long. Two critical requirements in the Act are:

1. Standardized travel form for submitting before travel (estimated) and final travel expenses (actual after the travel)
2. Roll call vote required for travel expenses for board members of the public body.

HACD does not comply with either requirement.

Travel expenses for the board and the executive team have been over \$50,000 since 2015. The primary driver of these costs is PHADA conferences. PHADA conferences are held in warm locations, such as San Diego, in January. A majority of the board members attend each conference and two of the three executive team members (executive director, chief financial officer, and operations director).

I sent Shelly Perkins, the executive director of HACD, and the board of HACD a series of emails. These emails, and other emails from other people, and some comments between the executive director and the board members, are included in the attached pdf file. I, along with other members of the public that raised issues, do not get any feedback from the executive director or any of the board members. In the attached file (which was received from HACD through a FOIA request from another member of the public), you will see some of the true feelings that the executive director has about public members that raise issues to HACD.

Here is a short listing of the email and the relevant page numbers in the attached file:

Item Reference	Date of Email String	General Description of Subject	Page Numbers
A	11/6/2021	Did HACD miss 50 ILCS 150 ...	63/64
B	11/6/2021	Standardized travel form ...	65

C	11/7/2021	Definition of Travel ...	66/72
D	11/9/2021	Board Resolution R2017-069	73

Item A

I reviewed HACD’s travel policy numerous times, and I would get a travel policy approved in 2012. The browser history on one of my computers shows that I looked at the travel policy on October 9, 2021, at 8:11:11 a.m. I am sure that I reviewed the travel policy shortly before sending out the email on 11/6/2021, too, but on a different device. You will note that the executive director’s email to the board indicates that they updated the website after receiving my email with the new travel policy that they approved in 2017. The policy says the HACD complies with 50 ILCS 150. How can HACD adhere to the Act when they don’t have a standardized travel expense form for estimating expenses before the trip, and an actual travel expense after the travel is completed? Also, it is very troubling that HACD does not have internal controls that ensure that their website is updated when relevant documents are updated, like their travel policy – four years is a long time to take to update their travel policy on their website.

I received no feedback.

Item B

I provided the executive director and the board with DeKalb County Government’s standardized travel form. I even mentioned that it was one form with a check box on the top for either estimated or actual expenses. I received no feedback.

Item C

I provided a reference to the definition of travel in 50 ILCS 150 in an email to the executive director and the board. I received no feedback.

Item D

I provided the DeKalb County Board’s Resolution R2017-069 to the executive director and the board.

I received no feed.

Board Meeting November 16, 2021

I attended the board meeting on November 16, 2021. At the board meeting, Mr. Horning, HACD’s attorney, discussed with Mr. Wahlstrom, HACD’s board chairman, HACD’s travel policy and its compliance with the Local Government Travel Expense Contract Act. Attached is the portion of the audio relating to that discussion. There is no mention of non-compliance with the standardized travel form or roll call voting on travel expenses for board members. The audio file is “20211116 travel policy discussion.mp3”.

Note: A request for review for the meeting was filed by Mr. Mark Charvat (the other public member that attended the meeting). A locked door met us before going into a locked reception room. We were kept in the locked reception room after the official start time of the meeting, and four members of the five members of the board were allowed into the meeting room. This denial was after Mr. Charvat made requests to be allowed into the meeting room through the locked door. The request for review is 2021 PAC 68606.

Next Steps

I will be sending additional emails with other issues.

The Dekalb County Board should have a hearing on HACD's compliance with statutes and regulations. In addition, HUD should have the inspector general's office investigate HACD's compliance with federal laws and regulations for the raised issues.

Also, unauthorized travel expenses should be recovered.

Sincerely,

Derek Van Buer