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Allan J. Wade  
Brandy S. Parrish

March 23, 2021

Eddie Jones  
Chairman  
Shelby County Commission  
Memphis, TN 38103

Dear Chairman Jones:

I write you on behalf of a group of citizens, who have come together to form a defense fund to support Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. against the unfounded attacks made against him by Mayor Harris' administration and the media. I have been asked to investigate the matter and the so-called "facts" upon which Mayor Harris' special counsel concluded that Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. may have violated the County charter and the ethics ordinance with respect to his business dealings with Memphis Junior Achievement.

While it is my intention to provide to you and the public with a complete and detailed analysis of all underlying facts and issues raised by Mayor Harris' special counsel, the Commercial Appeal and Otis Sanford of the Daily Memphian, my investigation is still continuing and I did not want to commit the same errors as the accusers by going off half-cocked without all the true and admissible evidence. As a lawyer we are trained to follow the facts and not uncorroborated suspicions. For this reason, it is astonishing to me that Mayor Harris' special counsel could reach the conclusion that he did, even though he admits in his report that the Larry Colbert Letter was not sworn to or based on clearly delineated quotes from Ford or on the personal knowledge of Colbert, who was not even employed by Junior Achievement when the County Commission considered the Junior Achievement grant. Also, persons identified by Colbert in his letter refused to corroborate Colbert's accusations of wrong doing by Ford.

Finally, Mayor Harris' special counsel could not even confirm that Junior Achievement had even purchased computers from Ford's company using County grant funds. Overall, the "report" by Mayor Harris' special counsel was completely devoid of any admissible evidence showing that Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. may have violated the County charter and the ethics ordinance with respect to his business dealings with Memphis Junior Achievement.

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with my preliminary analysis of this matter, since Mayor Lee Harris has asked you to remove Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. from his chairmanship of the Commission's budget committee. In my opinion, this entire matter stems from Mayor Harris' objective to remove Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. from his chairmanship of the Commission's budget committee. My opinion is supported by the fact that the Commercial Appeal's investigation did not commence until late November of 2020, more than eighteen (18) months after the Commission approved the Junior Achievement Grant, but coincidentally only less than a month after Commissioner Ford questioned Mayor Harris' actions in disregarding a Commission vote denying his request to approve a contract for RedRover Company. Also, Brian Faughnan advised me that he had been retained as Mayor Harris' special counsel on about December 18, 2020 to investigate the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Despite all of the accusations, there are several "facts" in Mayor Harris' special counsel's report and in the Commercial Appeal articles that undercut Mayor Harris' justification for removing Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. from his chairmanship of the Commission's budget committee, which are:

1. The "invoice" [actually a quotation not an invoice] upon which Mayor Harris' special counsel relies to show Ford's financial interest in the Junior Achievement grant was dated June 14, 2019, after the Budget Committee meeting May 29, 2019 at which the grant was recommended for approval by the full Commission;
2. The "invoice" quoted pricing for the computers that Junior Achievement's experts confirmed was below market prices that Junior Achievement could have obtained for identical equipment from Dell;
3. After Ford's Company made the quotation on June 14, 2019, Commissioner Ford **did not vote** to approve the grant to Junior Achievement even though there is no evidence that the quotation had been accepted by Junior Achievement before the Commission's July 2019 meeting;
4. The Commission's vote to approve the Junior Achievement Grant was unanimous, even without Ford's vote;
5. There is no credible evidence of any "quid pro quo" between Ford and Junior Achievement; and

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<sup>1</sup> The Special Counsel's 2021 Report was actually his second opinion on the matter. His 2021 Report reflects that he was consulted in 2020 about this matter and was unable "to conclude, much less to prove, that Commissioner Ford had an existing economic interest in the grant to Memphis Junior Achievement at the time of his legislative efforts to make the grant come into existence."

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6. The Commercial Appeal has not identified any interactions between Ford and other recipients of County grant funds.

In sum, the timing and one-sided attacks by Mayor Harris' special counsel, the Commercial Appeal and Otis Sanford of the Daily Memphian are suspicious and consistent with Mayor Harris' intent to remove Commissioner Edmund Ford, Jr. from his chairmanship of the Commission's budget committee before budget deliberations begin in early April, 2021. It is also uncharacteristic for the County's chief legal officer to release evidence considered by Harris' special counsel to the Commercial Appeal in December, 2020 while special counsel's investigation was still underway.

We are investigating the propriety of Mayor Harris using the power of his office to attack his political adversaries. Our initial impressions are that Commissioner Ford may have a defamation claim against Mayor Harris' special counsel, the Commercial Appeal and Otis Sanford of the Daily Memphian for their biased and sloppy reporting of this situation; but that is to be expected as incompetence is a hallmark of Mayor Harris' administration.

In any event, please let me know if you have any questions concerning my observations.

Very truly yours,

*/s/ Allan J. Wade*

Allan J. Wade



# Shelby County Government

LEE HARRIS  
MAYOR

February 9, 2021

Chairman Eddie S. Jones, Jr.  
Shelby County Board of Commissioners  
160 North Main Street, Suite 600  
Memphis, TN 38103

**VIA INTEROFFICE MAIL**

Re: Report on "Findings and conclusions regarding Commissioner Ford/Junior Achievement investigation/Referral to the Shelby County Ethics Commission (dated January 27, 2021)"

Dear Chairman Jones:

I am reaching out in regards to the above-referenced report. As you may know, the report summarizes the investigation of various interactions between Commissioner Ford, a local non-profit, and a \$450,000 grant he initiated to the non-profit. The report concludes that "Commissioner Ford has failed to adhere to requirements of the County Ethics Code and, also more importantly, committed a violation of the County Charter with respect to his business dealings with [the local non-profit]." The report calls for a second investigation by the County Ethics Commission.

The report makes findings and conclusions of a serious magnitude. Additionally, the report is accompanied by documentary evidence. Based on the facts and information contained in the report, I believe it is critical that we take reasonable steps right now to safeguard the County's grant process and taxpayer dollars. **Thus, I am requesting that you take steps to limit additional grant resolutions initiated by Commissioner Ford.**

Based on the findings and conclusions in the report, I believe you would be warranted to limit grant items that appear on the County Commission agenda. Alternatively, I believe you, as Chairman, and Commissioner Ford are in a position to agree to voluntarily enact reasonable limits on grant-making until the Ethics Commission has had a chance to convene and advise on the appropriate course. Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

All the best,

Lee Harris  
Mayor



## Shelby County Board of Commissioners

EDDIE S. JONES, JR.  
Chairman

February 26, 2021

The Honorable Lee Harris  
Vasco Smith Administration Building  
160 N. Main Street,  
Suite 1100  
Memphis, TN 38103

**VIA INTEROFFICE MAIL**

Dear Mayor Harris,

Thank you for sharing your concerns about the commission's agenda as it pertains to grants sponsored by Commissioner Edmund Ford. While it is true that the commission's rules grant the Chairman the authority to determine which items appear on the agenda, I think a blanket refusal to allow grants sponsored by Commissioner Ford to appear on the agenda would likely lead to another lawsuit challenging the Chairman's authority to control the agenda.

You may not be aware that several years ago, some commissioners, myself included, filed such a suit against former Chairman Justin Ford. Further, to my knowledge, Commissioner Ford has not been found in violation of the charter by a court of law and though there's supposedly an ethics investigation pending against him, there has been no ethics commission meeting publicly noticed so far and no finding by same. Therefore, in my view, it would be improper for me, as Chairman, to take punitive actions against him, denying him his right to fulfill his legislative duty to sponsor items, such as grant resolutions.

Sincerely,

Eddie S. Jones, Jr.  
Chairman  
Shelby County Board of Commissioners