New school board attorney may be hired Nov. 17

SCHOOL BOARD
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members.

Meagan Logan was the first to appear before the board, representing the Tallahassee office of Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell (RumbergerKirk). She was joined by partner Kayla Platt Rady.

The firm, which operates five offices (four in Florida and one in Birmingham, Ala.), currently represents six Florida school districts and has served as outside counsel to 44 of Florida's 67 school districts.

"The Tallahassee office, where your services would be provided, currently has five lawyers, including me and Kayla. Those five lawyers focus specifically in the area of education. Both myself and Jeff Grosholz, one of the individuals who would provide services, are board certified in education law by the Florida Bar. Together, the five of us represent 84 years of experience. We currently represent six school districts in the state of Florida: Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Hamilton, Suwannee and Walton counties. In that capacity, we have seen and experienced the everyday issues facing school districts, and feel that is truly a benefit to Taylor County," Logan said.

"We're not required to reinvent the wheel. We've seen it, we've dealt with it, and if we haven't, again, we have a vast network of contacts either within our law firm, which has about 100 lawyers, as well as externally. So we think that that experience is unmatched, and that that makes us a prime candidate to fill this seat in Taylor County as your school board attorney. We have experience in virtually every area facing school districts today: student discipline and expulsions, employee issues, HR, collective bargaining, curriculum, ESE, students with disabilities," she said.

School board member Brenda Carlton asked if there would be any scheduling conflicts with the other school boards the firm represents.

"You meet on the first and third Tuesdays of the month. I do not have any other boards that meet on those days currently. Currently, my boards that I usually attend their meetings, Columbia and Hamilton, are the second and fourth Tuesdays. Hamilton only meets one time a month on that second Tuesday, and so obviously (I) don't anticipate a conflict. But in the event of a conflict, including obviously reorganization – all boards reorganize on the same day in November – again, that's why there's five of us. That's where that team approach comes in handy in that, if it can't be me, you will certainly have another qualified attorney to sit in that seat and represent you at those board meetings," Logan said.



Meagan Logan (right) and Kayla Platt Rady (left) spoke on behalf of Tallahassee law of Rumberger, Kirk & Caldwell (RumbergerKirk), one of two applicants interviewed by the school board Tuesday.

School board member Deidra Dunnell asked if the publication of the board's Request for Qualifications (RFQ) back in September was the first time Logan became aware the board was looking for a lawyer.

"You might recall I was at an earlier meeting in March, when there were some discrepancies between the superintendent and board counsel, and so now I have been talking to you guys and informed and aware of you guys for about a year now, but obviously (we) just responded to the RFQ when it became available," Logan said.

At the March 24 meeting in Steinhatchee, Superintendent of Schools Reggie Wentworth brought Logan, then a Lake City attorney, along with a proposed contract, to replace Ball. However, the board voted 4-1 to keep Ball.

"So, since you referenced our meeting back in March, how did you become aware there was a concern in regards to our legal counsel?" Dunnell asked.

"I think the superintendent reached out to me," Logan said.

When Dunnell asked the nature of that discussion, Logan said that Wentworth, who at that time had been recently elected, "was looking to have an attorney that matched his vision and his strategy for going forward in those four years, and was just thinking of kind of changing direction or, you know, moving on."

"At that meeting, it seemed to become clear that the board wasn't interested in looking at separate counsel at that time. And when you became aware of that, I just would like to ask: Have you continued any contact with the district since that time?" Dunnell asked.

"So I'll be honest. I don't know if that's the impression I took, that the board wasn't interested in separate counsel. I walked away from that meeting with the impression that the board wasn't interested in new counsel for the board at that time. But that if there continued to be disagreements or if the superintendent felt strongly about it, that was something the board would consider, if you needed separate counsel. Since that time, we probably just connected socially. To be honest with you, you know, just a check-in or a text message. But that's it. Nothing work-wise or professionally," Logan responded.

She also stated she had not had any direct contact with any board members since the March meeting.

If hired, Logan said, she would communicate with the board primarily "by cell phone. Most communications are by phone. There is some occasional text communication, or an email."

Dunnell asked what experience Logan had navigating the relationship between the superintendent and the board.

"Obviously, with the superintendent being the CEO, managing those day-to-day affairs, and then having the board oversee policy and budget, and obviously getting involved where need be. But again, I do think they generally share a common goal. I think it is absolutely the role of the school board attorney to navigate those relationships and facilitate that relationship.

"You know, you pointed it out – you are technically the board attorney, but I would venture to say in smaller counties, the day-to-day workings and the majority of the work that you do is for the superintendent and the district staff. Obviously, you hope there's not a conflict. If there is, that's what conflict counsel is for, if they should need a separate lawyer if they're not seeing the same vision or have a discrepancy. But again, I view my role as school board attorney as to kind of bridge that gap and help them work toward that common goal for the school district," Logan said.

She said her firm would be available immediately if hired.

Cross City attorney Michael O'Steen was the second candidate interviewed, and he opened by telling board members that he is a seventh-generation Floridian and was the first in his family to earn a college degree.

"I come from a blue-collar family. Most of my family were commercial fishermen, right out of Horseshoe (Beach). Now, they mainly focus on cattle ranching," he said.

He said he became a lawyer in 2006 and opened his own practice in 2008 after working two years with the Public Defender's Office in Lake City.

He has served as Dixie County attorney and as city attorney for Fanning Springs, and currently serves as the board attorney for the Dixie County School Board.

"Let's get the white elephant out of the room – in 2022, I was wrongfully indicted. I've been vindicated," O'Steen stated, adding that he was acquitted of "all my charges."

"I was immediately put back into the practice of law by the Florida Bar, with no disciplinary measures against my license, no nothing. So, I appreciate the opportunity to come over here.

O'Steen was indicted in February 2021 alongside former Third Judicial Circuit State Attorney Jeff Siegmeister. In June 2022, a federal jury acquitted O'Steen of two conspiracy counts, but convicted him of extorting $60,000 from a client and failing to report the cash, and he was sentenced to 44 months in prison. In April 2025, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reversed both convictions and ordered a judgment of acquittal. He was reinstated to practice law the following month.

"I love children. I love our part of the world, O'Steen said, adding that besides practicing law, he serves as president of five investment companies, most of them land investment firms ranging from "small million dollar" to "multi-million dollar companies."

"So, I know the value of money and how to run a business, having been taught since I was a small boy how to earn your keep. A penny earned is a penny saved," O'Steen said.

He added, "No lawyer knows every law, but a good one knows how to find the answer."

He described himself as transparent, with an open-door policy, and invited board members to ask him anything.

He said the Taylor County School District was "only the second one I've applied to," and that the Dixie County board meets once a month.

O'Steen said he helped oversee the construction of the Dixie County Middle High School "from start to finish" during his first tenure as Dixie County's school board attorney.

"In regards to the superintendent and the board, how do you navigate that relationship, and what is your role in relation to those individuals?" Dunnell asked.

"My contract is with the board. I represent the board, who is a policy-making authority. The superintendent is a constitutional officer, and in that particular situation, specifically Dixie County, the superintendent has his own lawyer that will advise them on issues when there's a conflict between the board and the superintendent," O'Steen said.

He later clarified that when he said the superintendent had his own lawyer, he was referring to the attorney available through the statewide superintendents' association.

"My understanding is he gets his legal advice from other associations, not the board attorney. But we all work hand-in-hand over there. My job is to protect this board, who's a policy-making authority, and the superintendent's job is to administer the policy that's laid out by this board," O'Steen explained.

Chairman Danny Lundy asked O'Steen if he felt he could handle the broad spectrum of specialty areas (ESE, bargaining, human resources, etc.) a school board attorney would be called on to navigate.

O'Steen responded that he doesn't hesitate to ask other attorneys for help when he doesn't know an answer.

"I don't know all the law, but I have friends. I'm a very good networker," he said, adding that as a general practitioner who still runs a private practice, he has "plenty of resources to reach out" to.

Asked whether he would be available for an expulsion hearing or other urgent district business, O'Steen said he has just hired another attorney to work with him.

"The goal is when I take a job, to try to be at every scheduled meeting," he said. "But there's going to be times I may be in a trial or something, and you want to get a kid back to school, which I understand."

He said if he could not attend, an attorney who works for him, under his license and insurance, would fill in at no added cost to the board.

He said he would be "ready to go" as soon as the board decided to hire him.

The board did not discuss the candidates further once the interviews concluded and is expected to make a decision on filling the position at its annual organizational meeting Tuesday, Nov. 17.

Ball calls leaving Demps-Hughes off mailing list an 'oversight'

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"I mistakenly understood that I had until the close of business that day and discovered shortly after noon that submissions had been due at 12 p.m. That oversight was mine, and I accept responsibility for it," Demps-Hughes said. "However, my individual failure to meet the submission deadline does not resolve the separate question of whether all potentially qualified local attorneys were afforded comparable notice and access to the application materials."

Had she received the direct mailing, she said, she would have had more time to review the requirements and prepare her submission.

Outgoing board attorney Angela Ball was responsible for advertising the RFQ. It was posted with The Florida Bar and emailed to the Florida School Board Attorneys Association (FSBAA).

"Although not specifically directed by the board, letters were sent as a courtesy to attorneys that I routinely deal with and who maintain practices here," Ball said.

Ball said that leaving Demps-Hughes off the courtesy mailing was an "oversight in my office." She said it came from a misunderstanding over a voicemail Demps-Hughes left on Oct. 1.

"Ms. Demps-Hughes called my cell phone on Oct. 1 and left a lengthy message referencing 'advice to an applicant.' Based upon that call, I believed that she was included in the mailing and possessed the RFQ at that time. I intentionally did not speak to any attorneys about this RFQ," Ball said.

Under a 2024 board policy, the application process was placed under a "cone of silence." Ball said the restriction "was intended to avoid unsolicited contact with board members who would ultimately be vetting the candidates and making a decision, with the intent of the process being fair and impartial."

Two out-of-town firms submitted RFQs by the deadline. A third submission, from a Mount Dora firm, arrived at 3:15 p.m. and was rejected as late.

Board members interviewed the two candidates at their Nov. 3 meeting. (See related story.) No one at the meeting mentioned Demps-Hughes' concerns about how the position was advertised.

Demps-Hughes noted that the RFQ allows the board to reject submissions and reissue the solicitation.

"In light of the limited number of applicants, the absence of local submissions and the acknowledged oversight concerning distribution of application materials, I believe the board should consider reopening the application period for a reasonable, clearly announced period," she said. "I am not requesting that the board disregard its published deadline solely for my benefit. I am requesting consideration of a renewed process open to all qualified applicants under the same requirements."

The board attorney "occupies a position of substantial public trust, advising elected officials, representing the district in legal matters and safeguarding taxpayer resources," she said, and the process for choosing one "should inspire public confidence."

Superintendent Reggie Wentworth was asked to comment on Demps-Hughes' concerns, but did not respond.

LEGALS

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as possible. The public hearing may be continued to a future date at the meeting, without further legal notice in the local newspaper.

Any interested persons may appear and be heard on the aforementioned public hearing date. Notice is also given, pursuant to Florida Statutes 286.0105 that any person deciding to appeal any decision of the City Council with respect to any matter considered at the meeting will need a record of that meeting and may need to ensure that a verbatim record of the proceeding is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be heard.

Introduction and First Reading
Ordinance No. 1067

AN ORDINANCE OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PERRY, TAYLOR COUNTY, FLORIDA REGARDING SURPLUS LANDS; CONVEYING CERTAIN LAND; AND TO PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE DATE.

John Hart II, City Manager
Ward Ketring, Mayor

TAYLOR COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS
CONSTRUCTION ENGINEERING AND INSPECTION (CEI) SERVICES
DOCTORS' MEMORIAL HOSPITAL ROOFING RETROFIT, HARDENING AND REPAIR PROJECT
CDBG-MIT AGREEMENT NO. I0183

The Taylor County Board of County Commissioners is soliciting sealed Proposals from qualified firms to provide Construction Engineering and Inspection (CEI) services for the Doctors' Memorial Hospital Roofing Retrofit, Hardening and Repair Project. This procurement will be conducted as a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) in accordance with applicable requirements of 2 CFR Part 200, Taylor County procurement requirements, applicable Florida law, and FloridaCommerce CDBG-MIT requirements. Price/cost will be an evaluation factor along with qualifications, experience, project approach, capacity, and the other factors identified in the RFP.

The project is funded through FloridaCommerce Community Development Block Grant-Mitigation (CDBG-MIT) Agreement No. I0183 and is subject to applicable HUD and FloridaCommerce requirements, including the CDBG-MIT Federal Register Notice at 84 FR 45838, as amended. The construction phase is located at Doctors' Memorial Hospital, 333 N. Byron Butler Parkway, Perry, Florida 32347.

The underlying construction work includes roofing retrofit, hardening, and repair activities, including repair and/or replacement of roof membrane, insulation, flashing, structural decking and roofing load path, together with related hardened exterior components. CEI services are anticipated to include preconstruction coordination; construction administration; field observation and inspection; review of submittals, RFIs, schedules, testing, change requests, and contractor payment applications; progress documentation; substantial/final completion inspections; punch-list and closeout support; and related professional records and certifications.

Proposals must be submitted in a sealed envelope or similar package marked "Sealed Proposal - I0183 DMH Roof CEI Services" to the Clerk of Court, 1st Floor Courthouse, 108 North Jefferson Street, Suite 102, Perry, Florida 32347, no later than 4:00 P.M., local time, on December 4, 2026. The respondent's name and mailing address must be clearly shown on the outside of the package. Respondents should submit one (1) original and three (3) copies. Proposals will be publicly opened and respondent names announced at 6:10 PM or as soon thereafter, local time, on December 7, 2026 at the Taylor County Administrative Complex, 201 East Green Street, Perry, Florida 32347.

This is a competitive RFP procurement. Respondents must submit the technical and price/cost information required by the RFP. Taylor County will evaluate Proposals using the evaluation factors and relative weights stated in the RFP and will consider price, quality, and other factors in determining the proposal most advantageous to the program. The price/cost weighting included in the draft RFP is subject to final County and FloridaCommerce approval prior to publication.

Solicitation documents and additional information may be obtained from the Taylor County Grants Department, 201 East Green Street, Perry, Florida 32347, (850) 371-0377, melody.cox@taylorcountygov.com, and from the Taylor County website at www.taylorcountygov.com.

Qualified MBE, WBE, DBE, Section 3, and Veteran-Owned businesses are encouraged to submit Proposals. Taylor County reserves the right to reject any or all Proposals, waive minor irregularities, cancel or re-solicit this procurement, and make an award in the County's best interest consistent with applicable procurement and funding requirements. Final award is subject to Taylor County Board of County Commissioners approval and any required FloridaCommerce concurrence or approval.