



State of Florida
Department of Children and Families

Rick Scott
Governor

Mike Carroll
Interim Secretary

Office of Inspector General

Enhancing Public Trust in Government

Redacted Investigative Report 2014-0067 September 2, 2014

Keith R. Parks
Inspector General

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*“Provide leadership in the promotion of
accountability and integrity of State Government.”*





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DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Investigative Report
Case Number: 2014-0067



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INTRODUCTION

The Department of Children and Families (Department) is divided into six separate regions (Central, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, Southern, and SunCoast), each of which is sub-divided into circuit offices that align with the state's 20 judicial circuits. The Northeast Region is comprised of Circuits 3, 4, 7, and 8.¹ Each region is led by a Regional Managing Director who reports to the Deputy Secretary of the Department.

Children's Legal Services (CLS) is "the Department's law firm representing the State of Florida in child welfare matters."² CLS acts as Florida's legal authority on child welfare issues with the goal of successfully advocating for the care, safety, and protection of Florida's abused, abandoned, and neglected children. In addition to representing the state in circuit and appellate courts on Chapter 39³ matters, CLS serves numerous other functions, including but not limited to: providing technical assistance to the Department's Office of Child Welfare, training Child Protective Investigators (CPIs) and Community-Based Care (CBC) partners in child welfare legal issues, and staffing cases with CPIs and Case Managers to determine appropriate legal action.

On May 7, 2014, the Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG) received an anonymous complaint alleging that Northeast Regional Managing Director (RMD) David Abramowitz created a hostile work environment. The anonymous complainant noted that Mr. Abramowitz yelled at the CLS Managing Attorney (subsequently identified as CLS Circuit 4 Managing Attorney Tricia Meisner) during a meeting with CBC and Department employees. The anonymous complainant also indicated that on other occasions, Mr. Abramowitz used expletives and derogatory remarks toward staff members and threw paper or reports at staff members.

On May 15, 2014, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) contacted the OIG pertaining to a Discrimination Complaint received from Ms. Meisner alleging that Mr. Abramowitz discriminated against women via disparate treatment⁴ and harassment. Ms. Meisner reported that Mr. Abramowitz yelled at her during an April 30, 2014 meeting and she believed that Mr. Abramowitz's behavior toward her was because she was a woman.

¹ Circuit 3 consists of Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor Counties. Circuit 4 consists of Clay, Duval, and Nassau Counties. Circuit 7 consists of Flagler, Putnam, St. Johns, and Volusia Counties. Circuit 8 consists of Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy, and Union Counties.

² Quoted from the Department's intranet website.

³ Chapter 39, Florida Statutes, governs the safety and welfare of children in the State of Florida and under the state's care.

⁴ According to www.nolo.com, disparate treatment cases allege that an employee was treated worse than others based on a protected characteristic (race, gender, age, or other protected trait).

Based on the information provided by the anonymous complainant and Ms. Meisner, the OIG initiated an investigation on May 27, 2014. The OIG was assisted by OCR during the interview process.⁵

ALLEGATIONS AND FINDINGS

Allegation 1

Northeast Regional Managing Director David Abramowitz created a hostile work environment. If supported, the allegation would constitute a violation of Rule 60L-36.005(1) and (3)(e) and (f)1., F.A.C.; and Chapter 1, Section 1-8.a. and c.(5) and (6)(a), CFOP 60-55.

Findings

The information obtained **does not support** the allegation.

Allegation 2

Northeast Regional Managing Director David Abramowitz engaged in gender discrimination against a female employee. If supported, the allegation would constitute a violation of 42 U.S.C. § 2000e-2(1) and (2); § 760.10(1)(a), F.S.; Rule 60L-36.005(1) and (3)(e) and (f)1., F.A.C.; and Chapter 1, Section 1-8.a. and c.(5) and (6)(a), CFOP 60-55.

Findings

The information obtained **does not support** the allegation.

According to the OIG's review of the anonymous complaint, the following quoted information was disclosed, in pertinent parts:

I have been considering writing this letter for months, due to multiple situations of what can best be described as a hostile work environment for many employees. However, numerous complaints by others have been sent to Tallahassee with no change in the behavior and the behaviors by Mr. Abramowitz are in fact escalating.

As recently as a week ago, he proceeded to escalate his voice to the point of yelling at the local Managing CLS attorney in a partnership meeting attending [sic] by the CEO⁶ of the lead agency as well as several members of the DCF⁷ leadership team. His behavior left those in the room shocked, ashamed, and embarrassed that he was the leader of this agency.

⁵ Civil Rights Officer Sharon Pimley-Fong assisted with all interviews except that of Joy Andrews, which was a telephone interview conducted on June 13, 2014.

⁶ Abbreviation for "Chief Executive Officer."

⁷ Abbreviation for "Department of Children and Families."

He was angry with the Attorney [sic] for what he perceived to be advise [sic] he did not need and proceeded to yell at her that she needed to leave his meeting and when she attempted to do so, he then yelled at her things like "I want you removed from your position, I want you removed from my building, I am the RD,⁸ no one tells me what to do, I will have you fired. [sic] All of this while following her down the hallway, to the point that staff working in the building came out of their offices and this behavior was witnessed by many staff, to include those at the meeting and those in the general area.

He has been known to yell frequently at many of his leadership team to include the use of expletives, as well as derogatory remarks such as "you are an idiot [sic], your [sic] are stupid [sic], that is the stupidest thing you have ever done [sic], you "fucked up [sic], you "suck". The term "suck" is frequently used. . . He often yells when he is displeased, has been known to throw paper or reports at staff . . . and even has refused to speak with staff he is angry with and has told them he will not speak with them when they have attempted to engage him in a conversation.

He has made derogatory remarks about people's weight and general appearance, telling them either they need to diet and exercise or need to eat more, telling them they look pregnant and once even commenting, when being introduced to a CPI that her name is one he has seen on the back of the bathroom stall door in the boys [sic] bathroom.

He has no filters or regard for decorum. He does not respect his employees, he intimidates them.

Several months ago . . . the work environment in the NER⁹ was deteriorating. Most staff do not trust or respect him, openly and frequently make jokes about him and even those that do like him acknowledge that his behaviors are out of control. He frequently brags how he is in control of the other RMDs, controls and handles Tallahassee and deletes most of Pete Digre's¹⁰ emails. He openly says these things to staff on a regular basis.

As for me, I write this with anonymity, as I fear retaliation if not open reprisal by Mr. Abramowitz, should he ever learn the identity of its author.

The trust and respect for Mr. Abramowitz is gone, due to his abusive behaviors and we are begging for relief from this increasingly hostile work environment.

⁸ Abbreviation for "Regional Director."

⁹ Abbreviation for "Northeast Region."

¹⁰ Reference to Department Deputy Secretary Pete Digre.

We . . . really want Tallahassee leadership to have the chance to do the right thing.

Testimony of Children’s Legal Services Circuit 4 Managing Attorney Tricia Meisner¹¹

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Meisner attended a meeting between Department staff and members of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. (FSS).¹² During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz spoke of a particular 17-year-old child who would soon turn 18. Mr. Abramowitz stated that the Department would obtain a guardian for the child and then “opt out” the child from foster care. Due to recent changes, she knew the Department could not make the decision to opt a child out of foster care and the child could choose to remain in extended foster care beyond the child’s 18th birthday. She stated during the meeting, “Oh, come on David, now you know [we] can’t opt kids out of foster care.” Mr. Abramowitz became angry and said he did not want to hear from her. She felt there was information Mr. Abramowitz did not know but she did not get a chance to expound. It appeared that Mr. Abramowitz was moving on with the meeting, but then he would make “snide, belittling comments” toward her. Mr. Abramowitz stated, “I know more than you. I don’t need to hear from you anymore. I know all there is to know about this child.”

Ms. Meisner was upset, uncomfortable, and humiliated, and indicated to CLS Northeast Regional Director George Beckwith (her direct supervisor) that she needed to leave the meeting. She thought if she removed herself from the room, it would diffuse the situation. As she and Mr. Beckwith were walking toward the door, Mr. Abramowitz jumped from his chair and proceeded to yell and scream that he “was sick and tired of her” and that she “is not welcome back at any of my meetings.” Mr. Abramowitz was waving his arms, his face was red, and he stated, “I don’t want her in her position anymore.” She felt that Mr. Abramowitz was threatening her job and, even though she knows that Mr. Abramowitz is not in the CLS “chain of command,” she does not know what influence he may have over her position. As she and Mr. Beckwith left the meeting room, Mr. Beckwith asked Mr. Abramowitz, “What are you doing? You are acting like you are 12.” Mr. Abramowitz then slammed the door in Mr. Beckwith’s face.

She has been with the Department for 17 years and always felt that the Department was a collaborative agency where people can give and take information. She does not feel she was rude to Mr. Abramowitz and does not feel she did anything wrong. She does not believe she could have done anything differently other than to not have said anything and kept her mouth shut. She does not know how Mr. Abramowitz, as the RMD who oversees several program areas, could have exact details about all the processes. That is where CLS comes in to assist. She does not believe that Mr. Abramowitz would blatantly do something wrong, but she did not want anyone to think that Mr. Abramowitz was indicating the Department was going to opt children out of foster care.

¹¹ All witness statements presented in this report, unless quoted, are paraphrased statements.

¹² Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. (FSS) is the lead CBC organization in Duval and Nassau Counties.

In the hallway outside the meeting room, she was crying hysterically. Other employees came out of their offices to see what happened. An employee walked her to another section of the building, at which time she (Ms. Meisner) explained what happened. The employee stated that Mr. Abramowitz does not like to be questioned. She (Ms. Meisner) was embarrassed by what happened in the meeting, noting that this occurred in front of her Department colleagues and FSS employees.

She believes that Mr. Abramowitz's actions were unprofessional. She noted that Mr. Abramowitz likes to talk. He often cuts people off in meetings and simply moves on to the next topic. After the meeting, Mr. Beckwith met with Mr. Abramowitz to discuss what happened. Mr. Beckwith informed her that Mr. Abramowitz indicated he did not like her (Ms. Meisner) and did not want to deal with her in the future. She attended a meeting later that same date in which Mr. Abramowitz was in attendance, but he did not lead the meeting. She has also attended other meetings where Mr. Abramowitz was present, including a Project Team meeting in which Mr. Abramowitz left the meeting when she began to speak. She has since been informed by Northeast Regional Family and Community Services Director Patricia Medlock that it is no longer necessary for CLS to attend Project Team meetings.

She believes that Mr. Abramowitz treats female employees differently than male employees. She never saw Mr. Abramowitz raise his voice or be dismissive with male employees. She never saw him "cut off" male employees while they spoke, never heard him make comments on the physical appearance of male employees, and never saw him act in an unprofessional manner toward male employees. She noted three examples of Mr. Abramowitz's behavior toward women:

- On May 16, 2014, she observed Mr. Abramowitz tell a Family Integrity Program¹³ female employee (subsequently identified as Health and Human Services Director Joy Andrews) that she needed to gain weight.
- She observed Mr. Abramowitz tell Circuit 4 CPI Sapona Lee that she needed to eat a cheeseburger and gain weight. Ms. Lee did not react to the comment; she remained calm, and did not appear upset.
- She heard from another source that Mr. Abramowitz made comments to Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Supervisor (CPIS) Crystal Tyler regarding her hair, clothes, and eyelashes. She (Ms. Meisner) did not hear the comments first-hand; however, Ms. Tyler subsequently informed her that Mr. Abramowitz made a comment about seeing her (Ms. Tyler's) name on the back of the bathroom door.

She was unable to attend an April 25, 2013 meeting between the Department and FSS, and requested that CLS Circuit 4 Supervising Attorney Summer Boyd attend in her

¹³ The Family Integrity Program is available through the St. Johns County Government. According to the website www.sjcfi.us, the Family Integrity Program's mission is to work in partnership with the State of Florida and the local community to develop, implement, and manage a highly effective, strength-based community-based system of care for abused and neglected children and their families.

place. After the meeting, she was informed by Ms. Boyd that Mr. Abramowitz commented that he was not surprised she (Ms. Meisner) did not attend the meeting since she (Ms. Meisner) was not “interested enough to come.” During the meeting, Ms. Boyd was using her Blackberry device, and Mr. Abramowitz commented that she (Ms. Boyd) was probably telling Ms. Meisner what he had said because “[Ms. Boyd and Ms. Meisner] are like sisters.”

In response to questions, Ms. Meisner said she never heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language and never saw him throw items at employees. She felt physically threatened by Mr. Abramowitz’s behavior at the April 30, 2014 meeting, stating, “Mr. Abramowitz had lost control.” She wanted to be as far away from him as she could get and would never let herself be in a situation where she is alone with him. She no longer feels comfortable sharing information at a meeting that Mr. Abramowitz is leading, because, as she stated, “I am afraid it will happen again.”

She believes the work environment is hostile to the extent that she does not think employees feel comfortable expressing their views and contributing as equal members of the team for fear of making Mr. Abramowitz mad. The April 30, 2014 meeting was absolutely hostile. She and Mr. Abramowitz have never had a great relationship or been “on the same page.”

One of her first contacts with Mr. Abramowitz occurred in 2012, soon after Mr. Abramowitz began working for the Department. She and Mr. Beckwith met with Mr. Abramowitz and were talking about different things. She was trying to make a point, and Mr. Beckwith and Mr. Abramowitz joked about it. She became upset and she thinks Mr. Abramowitz took it poorly and got the impression that she was an emotional person. She was irritated over something Mr. Beckwith said; however, she does not recall what was said, and noted that Mr. Abramowitz did not “specifically do anything wrong.”

Issues Related to the April 30, 2014 Meeting

In her written complaint, Ms. Meisner identified 14 witnesses by name, who were present during the April 30, 2014 meeting. During the investigation, an additional four witnesses were identified as being present. As a result, a total of 18 witnesses were interviewed pertaining to the April 30, 2014 meeting.

Testimony of Children’s Legal Services Northeast Regional Director George Beckwith

On April 30, 2014, Mr. Beckwith attended a meeting between Department staff and members of FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz spoke of a particular child and indicated that the child would ultimately “opt out” of extended foster care, at which time Ms. Meisner stated that the child can elect to remain in foster care even after the child turns 18, due to a recent change in the law. Ms. Meisner indicated that a child must make their own decision to “opt out” and the Department cannot make the decision for the child. Ms. Meisner indicated that she was trying to protect the rights of the child and

that it was no longer a “done deal” that a child automatically “opts out” of foster care when the child turns 18.

Mr. Beckwith does not know how Mr. Abramowitz interpreted Ms. Meisner’s comments, but Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner “kept going back and forth.” Although he could not remember the exact comments, Mr. Beckwith indicated that Mr. Abramowitz responded to Ms. Meisner, “I know what I am doing. You think you know everything.” At that time, Ms. Meisner became noticeably upset and he (Mr. Beckwith) attempted to calm her down. Mr. Abramowitz continued to direct comments to Ms. Meisner, along the lines of, “Don’t worry, I know what I am doing. You come in here talking and thinking you know everything.” Ms. Meisner had tears welling up in her eyes and indicated to him (Mr. Beckwith) that she needed to leave the meeting. He and Ms. Meisner proceeded to walk toward the doors, at which time Mr. Abramowitz stood up out of his chair and started yelling loudly that Ms. Meisner could never be in his meetings again and should not be in her position. He (Mr. Beckwith) followed Ms. Meisner out of the room but stopped in the doorway. He felt he had a good relationship with Mr. Abramowitz as he and Mr. Abramowitz often joke back and forth with each other. In an attempt to diffuse the situation, he (Mr. Beckwith) asked Mr. Abramowitz, “What are you, 12 years old?” Mr. Abramowitz replied, “Yes. I am 12.” Mr. Abramowitz then slammed the door in his (Mr. Beckwith’s) face.

He located Ms. Meisner to check on her and then contacted his direct supervisor, CLS Statewide Director Grainne O’Sullivan, to report the incident. After speaking to Ms. O’Sullivan, he waited for Mr. Abramowitz to conclude the meeting. He wanted to speak to Mr. Abramowitz to try to determine what made Mr. Abramowitz react the way he did and what caused the incident to escalate. When he spoke to Mr. Abramowitz, he (Mr. Abramowitz) indicated that he did not like Ms. Meisner or her mannerisms. He (Mr. Beckwith) told Mr. Abramowitz that “we all have to work together and we need to move forward.”

He has always worked well with Mr. Abramowitz and he is surprised the incident escalated to that point. If Ms. Meisner had said something wrong, he (Mr. Beckwith) would have admonished her; however, Ms. Meisner’s comment in the meeting that it was not a foregone conclusion that a child will “opt out” of foster care was exactly what he (Mr. Beckwith) was thinking. He does not know what caused Mr. Abramowitz to react the way he did, and opined that it was a combination of Ms. Meisner pointing out the child’s option, and the personalities of Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner.

When asked if Mr. Abramowitz waved his arms in an aggressive manner, Mr. Beckwith indicated that Mr. Abramowitz is an animated person who is passionate about what he does. He (Mr. Beckwith) did not view any actions Mr. Abramowitz made with his arms or the way he stood up from his chair as aggressive and he never felt in fear or intimidated. He (Mr. Beckwith) believed that Mr. Abramowitz’s actions “in that brief moment, in that setting, in that meeting” were unprofessional and could have been handled in other ways. Mr. Beckwith stated, “I think it got away from him for a second.” He has never seen Mr. Abramowitz act this way before or since that date.

In response to questions, Mr. Beckwith stated that Mr. Abramowitz is very personable with his employees. He has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat male and female employees differently and observed that Mr. Abramowitz seems to treat all employees the same. He has never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on an employee's appearance; never heard Mr. Abramowitz direct derogatory remarks or obscene language towards an employee; never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee; and never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz. He does not view the overall work environment as hostile, but noted that the meeting on April 30, 2014 was hostile for that brief moment in time.

Soon after Mr. Abramowitz began with the Department, he and Ms. Meisner met with Mr. Abramowitz. Ms. Meisner became upset over something that was said during their meeting; however, he does not remember what it was.

He noted that Mr. Abramowitz has joked in the past that it is wrong that the CLS attorneys do not report to the RMDs and he (Mr. Beckwith) does not know if that truly bothers Mr. Abramowitz. The April 30, 2014 incident with Mr. Abramowitz has had no negative effect on Ms. Meisner's work performance and she even attended another meeting with Mr. Abramowitz that same date (April 30, 2014) as well as another meeting in St. Augustine at a later date. He (Mr. Beckwith) indicated that Ms. Meisner is very passionate about her work. She is bright, a really good lawyer, and she gets results. She has come a long way in her development as a manager, a lawyer, and as a person.

Testimony of Northeast Regional Family and Community Services Director Patricia Medlock

During the April 30, 2014 meeting, FSS Chief Executive Officer Edward "Lee" Kaywork and Mr. Abramowitz were discussing a particular child. Ms. Meisner interjected several times; however, she (Ms. Medlock) could not recall what Ms. Meisner said. Mr. Abramowitz and Mr. Kaywork looked up and seemed to indicate that they heard and understood what Ms. Meisner was saying and continued their conversation. Ms. Meisner continued to interject. She then became upset, started crying a little bit, and started to leave the meeting. As Ms. Meisner and her supervisor, Mr. Beckwith, walked toward the door, Mr. Abramowitz stood and stated that Ms. Meisner's interruptions were happening a lot, she needed to stop, and she was not to come back to any more meetings. Mr. Abramowitz has a boisterous, loud voice and the level of his voice did elevate; however, she did not hear him scream or yell. After Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz intentionally closed the doors, but she did not feel it was a "loud slam." Mr. Abramowitz then apologized to everyone in the room for getting upset.

She does not recall hearing Mr. Abramowitz make any comments about Ms. Meisner's position and does not recall Mr. Abramowitz waving his arms in an aggressive manner. She believed that Mr. Abramowitz was unprofessional toward Ms. Meisner but also feels that both Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner could have handled the situation differently. She (Ms. Medlock) has been approached by employees of other agencies who

indicated that Ms. Meisner has a tendency to interrupt people and not let them speak. She does not feel that Mr. Abramowitz “cuts off” people, but noted he is very quick and likes to keep meetings moving.

She believes that Mr. Abramowitz treats all employees the same. She has never directly heard Mr. Abramowitz comment on the appearance of employees. She noted that Mr. Abramowitz likes to joke around and he could have said things that were misinterpreted by individuals. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz’s behavior, and his behavior has never negatively affected her ability to do her job.

She feels the work environment is supportive and challenging, but is not hostile. Mr. Abramowitz is very open, very transparent, and very involved. He is willing to talk with the employees and always tries to connect with the front-line workers.

Testimony of Northeast Regional Operations Manager Linda Compton

During the April 30, 2014 meeting, Ms. Meisner attempted to clarify something that Mr. Abramowitz stated. Mr. Abramowitz seemed to indicate to Ms. Meisner that he understood and she could stop talking; however, Ms. Meisner continued to speak, and Mr. Abramowitz became agitated and angry. Mr. Abramowitz then asked Ms. Meisner to leave the meeting, but she did not leave. Ms. Meisner remained seated and started to cry, at which time Mr. Abramowitz asked her a second time to leave. Ms. Meisner started to leave, and Mr. Abramowitz stood and in a raised voice asked her to leave and not come back to any of his meetings. She (Ms. Compton) did not see Mr. Abramowitz waving his arms in a threatening manner and does not recall hearing any other comments by Mr. Abramowitz. After Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left the room, he (Mr. Abramowitz) closed the door. She noted that the door cannot really be slammed.

Ms. Compton opined that Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner appeared to be saying the exact same thing but in a different way. She believed that Ms. Meisner should have stopped speaking when Mr. Abramowitz indicated he understood, and it was clear there was “something brewing” between them. Ms. Meisner was rude to Mr. Abramowitz and should not have “called him out” in an open meeting. She (Ms. Meisner) should not have kept “going and going,” but did not deserve to be yelled at by Mr. Abramowitz. She (Ms. Compton) believed Ms. Meisner is a “wonderful attorney” and was trying to clarify the information; however, it was clearly time for her to stop talking. She (Ms. Compton) believed Mr. Abramowitz was unprofessional, and he acknowledged that fact to the meeting attendees after Ms. Meisner left the room. He apologized to those remaining in the room and indicated that what they had witnessed was not his normal behavior. Mr. Abramowitz was clearly remorseful for exhibiting that type of behavior.

In response to questions, Ms. Compton indicated that she does not believe Mr. Abramowitz treats male and female employees differently, and has never heard him use obscene language or derogatory remarks. She has heard Mr. Abramowitz “tease” employees, but believes it is done in humor. She has heard him make comments about blonde hair, but she was not personally offended. Mr. Abramowitz is passionate about

his work, he is very transparent, and he does not hide anything. She never saw him throw anything at an employee. She has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior and does not believe the work environment is hostile. She opined that Mr. Abramowitz cares very deeply about his employees, and is loud and boisterous about his feelings.

Testimony of Northeast Regional Program Manager Susan Bell

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Bell attended a meeting between Department staff and members of FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz spoke of a particular 17-year-old child who would soon turn 18. Mr. Abramowitz stated that he would make sure the child was appointed a guardian and hopefully the child would be opted out of extended foster care. Ms. Meisner interjected on the legal guardianship and made comments on the case; however, Mr. Abramowitz did not want Ms. Meisner to proceed with sharing the information and "cut her off." Mr. Abramowitz indicated that Ms. Meisner did not need to be at the meeting and could leave if she wanted to leave. Ms. Meisner indicated she wanted to provide information; however, Mr. Abramowitz ended the conversation. Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith proceeded to leave the meeting, at which time Mr. Abramowitz told Ms. Meisner not to come back to his meetings. Mr. Beckwith asked Mr. Abramowitz, "What, are you 12?" Mr. Abramowitz then shut the doors in a "noticeable manner." Mr. Abramowitz apologized to everyone in the room, stating he lost his cool, his actions were not of his character, and he was upset with Ms. Meisner and "lost it." She does not recall hearing Mr. Abramowitz say anything about Ms. Meisner's position, but Mr. Abramowitz did state to Ms. Meisner that he did not want to hear what she had to say and that he knew what he was doing on this case. Mr. Abramowitz's voice was raised and he was clearly upset with Ms. Meisner. She believes that Mr. Abramowitz's actions were unprofessional and not something you would expect in a meeting. Ms. Meisner did not appear angry, she did not raise her voice, and she was just trying to tell her side.

She (Ms. Bell) has heard Mr. Abramowitz raise his voice while in his office, but never in a group meeting until the April 30, 2014 meeting. She has attended other meetings in which Mr. Abramowitz has "cut off" Ms. Meisner and asked her (Ms. Meisner) not to continue talking. Mr. Abramowitz wants people to present information in a brief manner and get to the point. He does not want people to expound on a topic when he is ready to move on. Mr. Abramowitz is like this with male and female employees, and she has not specifically seen him treat female employees differently than male employees. Mr. Abramowitz often compares employees to the military, expresses his opinion, and shares his military experiences. Mr. Abramowitz acknowledged that he does not have a good filter. She heard from other sources that Mr. Abramowitz has made inappropriate comments to employees, but believed that Mr. Abramowitz has gotten better.

In response to questions, Ms. Bell stated that she has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz, and his behavior has never adversely affected her work performance. When asked if she believed the work environment was hostile, Ms. Bell noted that Mr. Abramowitz says things without thinking how they impact people. He tries to make jokes, but joking can be bad for

work. She has heard him make comments on people's skills and ability to perform a job; however, the comments were made in administrative meetings and not directly to the employee.

Testimony of Northeast Regional Family Safety Program Administrator Paul Kellam

During the April 30, 2014 meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was discussing children in the Independent Living Program and how he was going to opt the children out. Ms. Meisner attempted to correct him, stating he (Mr. Abramowitz) did not use the right language and noting the children make the decision to opt out. Mr. Abramowitz did not want to be corrected and indicated that Ms. Meisner should stop talking. He does not recall the exact words Mr. Abramowitz used, but he (Mr. Abramowitz) let Ms. Meisner know that she should not be talking. Ms. Meisner began to get emotional and Mr. Abramowitz told her she could excuse herself from the meeting. At some point, Ms. Meisner got up to leave the meeting and Mr. Abramowitz became upset and said, "I do not want you back at this table" and "I do not want you working here." He (Mr. Kellam) is "pretty sure" Mr. Abramowitz said he wanted Ms. Meisner fired from her position. Mr. Abramowitz's voice was raised and he was loud. He was pointing at Mr. Beckwith stating, "I don't want her back." Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left the meeting, and Mr. Abramowitz appeared to try to slam the door closed. After closing the door, Mr. Abramowitz apologized to the individuals in the meeting, saying that the incident never should have happened. Mr. Abramowitz indicated that there is an issue between Ms. Meisner and him in their working relationship that they need to work on. Mr. Abramowitz also indicated that nothing like that had happened since he was in the military.

He opined that Ms. Meisner was not rude to Mr. Abramowitz, and he (Mr. Kellam) believed that Ms. Meisner was correct in the information she presented and in trying to make sure Mr. Abramowitz presented accurate information; however, perhaps Ms. Meisner could have waited until a later time to discuss the matter with Mr. Abramowitz. He believed that Mr. Abramowitz's behavior was unprofessional and it was inappropriate for this to happen in a meeting with a community partner organization. He believed that Mr. Abramowitz had his mind set on the information he wanted to provide and was sharing that information with people who are important to him. It probably hurt him to have Ms. Meisner correct the information he provided; however, it probably would have been better if Mr. Abramowitz had let Ms. Meisner leave the room and then continued with the meeting.

In response to questions, Mr. Kellam indicated that he had never seen Mr. Abramowitz act in this manner. He indicated that he had no first-hand knowledge that Mr. Abramowitz treats female employees differently from male employees; however, he has heard from other employees that Mr. Abramowitz may have made inappropriate comments to female employees (Circuit 4 CPI Jennifer Stockman and Circuit 7¹⁴ Program Administrator Elsie Bellevue). Mr. Abramowitz has previously stated that he (Mr. Abramowitz) has no filters. He (Mr. Kellam) has not heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language or derogatory comments toward employees, never seen him throw

¹⁴ Circuit 7 consists of Flagler, St. Johns, Putnam, and Volusia Counties.

something at an employee, never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz, and his job performance has never been adversely affected by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Mr. Kellam opined that some employees may feel the work environment is hostile based on things Mr. Abramowitz said or did. Ms. Meisner and the people who witnessed Mr. Abramowitz's behavior at the April 30, 2014 meeting might feel the work environment is hostile, as might employees who overheard the meeting.

Testimony of Northeast Regional Senior Management Analyst Supervisor Melissa Walker

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Walker attended a meeting between Department staff and members of FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was speaking to Mr. Kaywork regarding children "opting out" of the Independent Living Program, but she (Ms. Walker) did not recall the exact words he used. At that time, Ms. Meisner tried to interject; however, Mr. Abramowitz ignored Ms. Meisner and continued speaking. When Mr. Abramowitz paused, Ms. Meisner stated, "First of all," and proceeded to say something about the legality of the opting out process, and then said, "Second of all," and provided more information. Mr. Abramowitz said something indicating, "I got this. Let me finish," and continued to speak to Mr. Kaywork. Ms. Meisner continued to make comments and Mr. Abramowitz said, "I know what I am doing," or something to that effect. Ms. Meisner then stated, "Oh, I forgot, you know more than me," to which Mr. Abramowitz replied that he had everything handled. Mr. Abramowitz was attempting to explain something and, regardless of whether the information Mr. Abramowitz was providing was right or wrong, Ms. Meisner kept trying to interrupt him. Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith began talking amongst themselves when Mr. Abramowitz stated to Ms. Meisner that she could leave the meeting if she wanted. Ms. Meisner stayed but began to cry.

She (Ms. Meisner) and Mr. Beckwith subsequently proceeded to leave the meeting. When they got to the door, Mr. Abramowitz stood and indicated he did not want Ms. Meisner to come back to the meetings or be part of any future meetings. Mr. Beckwith said to Mr. Abramowitz, "What, are you 12?" Mr. Abramowitz responded, "Yes. I am 12," and forcefully shut the door with both hands. She (Ms. Walker) opined that Ms. Meisner was rude, disrespectful, and unprofessional in her behavior toward Mr. Abramowitz. She did not feel that Mr. Abramowitz's behavior was unprofessional before Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left the meeting. However, she wished Mr. Abramowitz had handled things differently when they did leave the meeting, in that she felt Mr. Abramowitz should have just let them leave. She had never seen Mr. Abramowitz behave in this manner before or since the April 30, 2014 meeting; however, she noted that Ms. Meisner had dominated meetings and tried to talk over other people in previous meetings.

In response to questions, Ms. Walker indicated that she has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard him make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him use derogatory or obscene language to an employee. She has heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language; however, it was never directed at anyone, but used when he was frustrated

with a process. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz, and his behavior has never adversely affected her work performance. She does not believe Mr. Abramowitz has created a hostile work environment.

Ms. Walker noted that Mr. Abramowitz has a military background, is “larger than life,” is “rough around the edges,” and “needs a little help with his filters.” She does not know any RMD, except Mr. Abramowitz, who knows employees’ names, their children’s names, and who takes the time to call employees when they are in the hospital. Mr. Abramowitz has flaws and could have handled things at the meeting differently, but “he has done a lot of things for people.” A lot of people do not understand Mr. Abramowitz and do not get his method of operation because he is a “get in your face” type of person. He is very blunt, very transparent, and some people do not know how to handle him; however, he has employees’ best interests at heart. She does not believe that anybody is threatened at work, but noted that is her perspective. She believes that the situation at the April 30, 2014 meeting got blown out of proportion.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Program Administrator Chandara Ashley¹⁵

During the April 30, 2014 meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was discussing an agenda item and Ms. Meisner was providing guidance on contacting someone regarding the status of a case, and “things escalated.” Mr. Abramowitz said he would make contact (with an unnamed person). Ms. Meisner advised it was “not in the best interest,” and Mr. Abramowitz indicated he would do it despite Ms. Meisner’s advice. Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner “went back and forth” a couple of times. Mr. Abramowitz stated he was tired of hearing what Ms. Meisner had to say and she could leave the meeting; however, Ms. Meisner remained. She (Ms. Ashley) noticed Ms. Meisner became upset and was about to cry. A few minutes later, she (Ms. Meisner) began to leave the meeting and Mr. Abramowitz stood as Ms. Meisner passed. Mr. Abramowitz stated he never wanted to see Ms. Meisner in his meetings again. He was loud and his voice was raised. Mr. Beckwith asked Mr. Abramowitz, “What is wrong? You are acting like a 10 year old.” Mr. Abramowitz responded, “I am a 10 year old.” Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith were outside the room and Mr. Abramowitz forcefully closed the door. Mr. Abramowitz apologized for his behavior to the people in the room, and indicated he has not acted that way in a very long time. At some point during the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz commented that he wanted to see Ms. Meisner out of her position.

In response to questions, Ms. Ashley indicated that Mr. Abramowitz definitely behaved in an unprofessional manner, but she has never seen him act that way at any other time. He did cut Ms. Meisner off in the meeting, but she does not recall if it happened on any other occasions. She never noticed if Mr. Abramowitz treats female employees differently than male employees, and cannot say if his actions were gender-related. She has no first-hand knowledge of Mr. Abramowitz making comments on the appearance of employees, and has never heard him use obscene language or disparaging remarks toward an employee. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, never felt threatened by his behavior, and her ability to do her

¹⁵ Ms. Ashley is also known as “Chandara Arvingar.”

job has never been adversely affected. She would not call the work environment hostile, but indicated it is “uncomfortable.”

Testimony of Government Operations Consultant II Janet McMahan

On April 30, 2014, Ms. McMahan attended a meeting between Department staff and members of FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz spoke of a specific child and Ms. Meisner responded that the child was not going to do what Mr. Abramowitz indicated, and that Mr. Abramowitz needed to listen to her recommendations. Mr. Abramowitz replied, and before Ms. Meisner could respond back, Mr. Abramowitz started yelling at Ms. Meisner and then said to Mr. Beckwith that he wanted her gone. Ms. Meisner stood and started to leave the room. Mr. Abramowitz went to the door and shouted that he wanted her gone and did not want her back in the meeting. Mr. Abramowitz has a loud voice but he got much louder. When questioned about Mr. Abramowitz’s arm movements, Ms. McMahan stated that Mr. Abramowitz is very demonstrative and she is not sure if his arm movements were aggressive. She believed Mr. Abramowitz spread his arms out when he went to the door. She does not recall Mr. Abramowitz slamming the door, and indicated he may have closed it. When asked if Mr. Abramowitz behaved unprofessionally toward Ms. Meisner, Ms. McMahan responded, “Definitely.” However, she believed that Ms. Meisner interrupted Mr. Abramowitz and was unprofessional toward him as well. She opined that Ms. Meisner and Mr. Abramowitz discussed this case previously and had a difference of opinion. He reiterated his opinion and she (Ms. Meisner) tried to give legal advice. Ms. Meisner interrupted Mr. Abramowitz before he was through speaking, but he interrupted her as well.

In response to questions, Ms. McMahan said she had never heard Mr. Abramowitz yell at anyone until that meeting; however, he is very direct and says things that could be worded in a better way. She noted that interrupts people when they are talking; however, he does it with everybody. Mr. Abramowitz talks a lot and is very energetic. When he leads a meeting and somebody is talking, he may “jump in” with whatever he is thinking at the time.

In response to questions, Ms. McMahan said that she has never witnessed Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees. She never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on employees’ appearance, never heard him use disparaging remarks or obscene language, and never saw him throw anything at an employee. She has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz, her job performance has never been adversely affected by Mr. Abramowitz’s behavior, and she does not believe the work environment is hostile.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Executive Operating Officer Charles Young

On April 30, 2014, Mr. Young attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. He was not really paying attention, but believes there was a discussion between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner on a particular child. He thinks there was a difference of opinion on what should happen with the child and the conversation elevated. It appeared that the meeting had moved on to another subject when Ms. Meisner stood

and tearfully left the room. Mr. Abramowitz asked Mr. Beckwith not to let Ms. Meisner come to future meetings. He (Mr. Young) does not recall Mr. Abramowitz saying anything else. He does not understand why Ms. Meisner was at the meeting, and noted that before Mr. Abramowitz became the RMD, CLS did not attend this type of meeting. The April 30, 2014 meeting did get loud and “it could have been both” of them (Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner) who were loud. He did not see Mr. Abramowitz stand and does not think Mr. Beckwith left the meeting with Ms. Meisner. When asked if he believed Mr. Abramowitz was unprofessional toward Ms. Meisner, Mr. Young stated, “Mr. Abramowitz is an Army man and so am I. You are invited to somebody’s house, you have to respect them. She was not respectful. If she had an issue, she should have held it privately. Why argue with somebody when sitting in their house?”

In response to questions, Mr. Young stated he has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees. He has never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language, and never saw him throw anything at an employee.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Chief Executive Officer Edward “Lee” Kaywork

On April 30, 2014, Mr. Kaywork attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was making a point when Ms. Meisner interrupted and corrected him. Mr. Abramowitz objected, and the dialogue escalated back and forth between them (Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner). Mr. Abramowitz indicated that he was not looking for a legal opinion. Both individuals raised their voices and Mr. Abramowitz stated that Ms. Meisner was not invited to the meeting, she should not be at the meeting, and he wanted her to leave. Ms. Meisner responded with a comment; however, he does not remember what she said. Things got out of control and neither Mr. Abramowitz nor Ms. Meisner was listening to the other. Ms. Meisner eventually stood to leave, at which time Mr. Abramowitz told her not to come back. It was clear that Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner did not have a good working relationship. He (Mr. Kaywork) believed that Mr. Abramowitz stood as Ms. Meisner was leaving the room. Mr. Abramowitz stated that he did not want to see Ms. Meisner again; however, he does not remember Mr. Abramowitz making any comments about her position. He (Mr. Kaywork) opined that Ms. Meisner is viewed as a barrier and she impacts the entire organization. She is difficult to work with and dominates the direction of anything with which she is involved. He has previously heard Mr. Abramowitz comment that Ms. Meisner is a barrier. He does not believe that Mr. Abramowitz slammed the door after Ms. Meisner left the room.

Mr. Abramowitz’s behavior was unprofessional, as was Ms. Meisner’s. It was unusual for Mr. Abramowitz to act in that manner, but he noted that Ms. Meisner expresses strong opinions and will dominate a conversation to get her way. When asked if Mr. Abramowitz treated male employees differently than female employees, Mr. Kaywork responded, “When he first got here, I would say yes.” He noted that when Mr. Abramowitz first began his employment with the Department after his career in the

army, it seemed to take a while for him to adjust to the cultural change from a military situation to civilian. Mr. Abramowitz sometimes spoke before he thought, and “the military has a different philosophical approach on everything they do. The language is more vernacular in the military than it is in the business world.” He (Mr. Kaywork) spoke to Mr. Abramowitz in private and explained that the civilian world was different from the military world, and Mr. Abramowitz was receptive to his (Mr. Kaywork’s) comments.

In response to questions, Mr. Kaywork indicated that he never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language, and never saw him throw anything at an employee. He indicated that the incident at the meeting was unfortunate.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Chief Operating Officer, Services and Support Larry West

On April 30, 2014, Mr. West attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was discussing information when Ms. Meisner “mumbled things under her breath” to Mr. Beckwith. Ms. Meisner said she did not agree with some of the information Mr. Abramowitz provided. Ms. Meisner then interrupted Mr. Abramowitz, indicating she did not agree with the information. Things escalated into an exchange of words. He (Mr. West) was sitting across from Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith, and Ms. Meisner stated to Mr. Beckwith that she could not take this and cannot do this anymore. She then asked Mr. Beckwith if he saw Mr. Abramowitz “roll his eyes” at her. Ms. Meisner then started to cry and pack her things to leave. Mr. Beckwith attempted to calm her down, but Ms. Meisner stood to leave. This seemed to bother Mr. Abramowitz, who was still conducting the meeting. Mr. Abramowitz raised his voice and said, “Get her out. I do not want her in here.” Mr. Abramowitz stood and pushed the doors closed after Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left. After he shut the doors, Mr. Abramowitz stated that he did not want Ms. Meisner at future meetings, and he (Mr. West) thinks Mr. Abramowitz said, “I want her gone.” The behavior of Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner was unprofessional during the meeting and the situation escalated on the part of both parties. He (Mr. West) believes the situation arose from Ms. Meisner’s actions in previous meetings, in which she interrupted Mr. Abramowitz and acted unprofessionally.

In response to questions, Mr. West indicated that he has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. Mr. West has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz’s behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Chief Operating Officer, Case Management Services Ann Phillips

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Phillips attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz stated that he was going to see a particular child and Ms. Meisner told him not to see the child. The conversation between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner went back and forth several times. Mr. Beckwith was present and tried to calm Ms. Meisner, at which time Mr. Abramowitz asked her (Ms. Meisner) to leave the meeting. She (Ms. Phillips) cannot recall the exact words that were spoken when Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner were exchanging words, but they were not happy with each other. Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith stood and began to leave the room, and Mr. Beckwith told Mr. Abramowitz that he was acting like a 12-year-old. She thinks Mr. Abramowitz slammed the door after Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left. She does not remember if Mr. Abramowitz said anything about Ms. Meisner's position or if Mr. Abramowitz said anything about being tired of hearing what she (Ms. Meisner) had to say. She does recall Mr. Abramowitz saying that he did not want Ms. Meisner to attend any future meetings.

When asked if Mr. Abramowitz's behavior was unprofessional during the meeting, Ms. Phillips responded that she thinks he handled it poorly. She has been in other meetings with Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner, during which she (Ms. Meisner) was disrespectful toward Mr. Abramowitz. She believes that Ms. Meisner handled the situation at the April 30, 2014 meeting inappropriately, and Ms. Meisner should have spoken to Mr. Abramowitz one-on-one after the meeting. She believes both parties were to blame, as Mr. Abramowitz lost his temper and Ms. Meisner did not act appropriately for her position. After Ms. Meisner left the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz apologized to the attendees for losing his temper.

In response to questions, Ms. Phillips indicated that she has never noticed Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. She (Ms. Phillips) has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and she never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. In-House Legal Counsel Stacey West

On April 30, 2014, Ms. West attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was discussing a particular child and the action he was going to take in the case. Ms. Meisner spoke, indicating that the information Mr. Abramowitz provided was not correct. Mr. Abramowitz responded in a way that indicated he heard what Ms. Meisner said, but he continued talking. Ms. Meisner said, in a sarcastic manner, that Mr. Abramowitz knew more about the child than she did. Mr. Abramowitz responded that he did know more about the child, and the exchange continued. Ms. Meisner stood and started to leave the room. Mr. Abramowitz then also stood and said she (Ms. Meisner) could leave and not come back. Mr. Beckwith followed Ms. Meisner out of the room and said something to Mr. Abramowitz about acting like a 12-year-old. Mr. Abramowitz yelled that Ms. Meisner was not welcome back to the meeting as he (Mr. Abramowitz) forcefully closed the door. Mr. Abramowitz

raised his voice, but Ms. Meisner's voice was normal. She (Ms. West) is not sure of the exact words Mr. Abramowitz used, but at some point he said something along the lines that when he was saying things, she (Ms. Meisner) always interrupted. After the door was closed, Mr. Abramowitz stated that he wanted Ms. Meisner gone, and he should not have acted the way he did. She believed that Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner were unprofessional, and she has observed Ms. Meisner interrupt in previous meetings.

In response to questions, Ms. West indicated that she has never noticed Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and she never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Case Management Organization Director LaTanya Wynn-Hall

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Wynn-Hall attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was discussing a specific case when Ms. Meisner interjected to correct something Mr. Abramowitz had stated. Ms. Meisner sarcastically said to Mr. Abramowitz, "Whatever you think is right." There was some type of verbal exchange between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner, and he continued with the meeting. Ms. Meisner became upset and stood to leave the meeting. At some point during the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz stated that he was tired of hearing what Ms. Meisner had to say and he no longer wanted her in her position. Mr. Abramowitz stood to open the door and told Ms. Meisner that she was not allowed to attend future meetings. After Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left the room, Mr. Abramowitz closed the door with force and continued the meeting. She (Ms. Wynn-Hall) believed that Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner were unprofessional during the meeting. Mr. Abramowitz is passionate about what he does, but he has a certain style that can be perceived in different ways. She witnessed previous exchanges between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner, but is surprised this situation elevated to such a high level.

In response to questions, Ms. Wynn-Hall indicated that she has never noticed Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees and indicated he treats everyone the same. She has never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. Ms. Wynn-Hall has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and she never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Controller Denise Hentkowski

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Hentkowski attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. She originally met Mr. Abramowitz at this meeting, but did not officially meet Ms. Meisner. She was sitting behind Ms. Meisner, so she could not see everything going on during the exchange between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner. Ms. Hentkowski

opined that it seemed to be an insubordinate action by Ms. Meisner. She (Ms. Meisner) said to Mr. Abramowitz that he would know better since he was there. The meeting continued, and Ms. Meisner subsequently stood. Mr. Abramowitz then stood, opened the door, and asked Ms. Meisner to leave. Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner both raised their voices, they were both unprofessional, and she believes that both are to blame. She does not recall Mr. Abramowitz stating anything about not wanting Ms. Meisner at future meetings, anything about being tired of hearing what she had to say, or anything about her position. She does not think Mr. Abramowitz slammed the doors; however, the doors did make a noise when he shut them. Mr. Abramowitz apologized to the attendees for the disruption and raised voices.

In response to questions, Ms. Hentkowski indicated that this was her first meeting with Mr. Abramowitz, and she has never noticed him treat female employees differently than male employees. She has never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. Ms. Hentkowski has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and she never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Chief Financial Officer Robert Miller

On April 30, 2014, Mr. Miller attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz made a statement and Ms. Meisner corrected Mr. Abramowitz, indicating the information he provided was not really true. Mr. Abramowitz stated something to the effect that he knew more about the children than she did, and Ms. Meisner responded, "You just think you do." Ms. Meisner audibly exhaled and rolled her eyes, which he (Mr. Miller) indicated was not unusual behavior for her. He opined that Ms. Meisner is somewhat immature and disrespectful. Mr. Abramowitz responded that he did know more about this child. At some point, Ms. Meisner's eyes welled up, she muffled a cry, and Mr. Abramowitz stated that she could leave the meeting if she wanted. Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith whispered between themselves, and Ms. Meisner stood and walked toward the door.

He (Mr. Miller) believed that Ms. Meisner made a comment; however, he could not hear it and indicated that she may have cleared her throat. At that time, Mr. Abramowitz stood and "erupted," saying he wanted Ms. Meisner out of the meeting, he was not going to put up with her behavior, and he did not want her back. Mr. Beckwith said, "Come on. Are we 12 years old?" Mr. Abramowitz repeated that he wanted her out, and closed the doors after Mr. Beckwith and Ms. Meisner left the room. He does not remember Mr. Abramowitz slamming the doors, but he "popped the doors shut." At that time, Mr. Abramowitz apologized several times to the people in the room for losing his temper and "blowing up the meeting." He (Mr. Miller) indicated it was extremely awkward in the room, and he believes that Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner were unprofessional in the meeting. Mr. Abramowitz was "mad and out of control." He (Mr. Miller) indicated that Mr. Abramowitz is boisterous, loud, and says what is on the tip of his tongue, regardless of whether it is advisable. His voice during the exchange with

Ms. Meisner became progressively louder. Ms. Meisner's voice was not raised; however, he does not feel her tone was appropriate. He (Mr. Miller) does not recall Mr. Abramowitz saying that he was tired of hearing what she had to say, does not recall anything being said about her position, and does not recall Mr. Abramowitz waving his arms in a threatening manner.

In response to questions, Mr. Miller indicated that he has never noticed Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. He has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Lead Contract Compliance Specialist Linda Dave

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Dave attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz was talking about a case when Ms. Meisner commented that she did not agree with what Mr. Abramowitz said. She (Ms. Dave) believed they were talking about children who were close to aging out of foster care. Mr. Abramowitz said something about "opting out," and Ms. Meisner corrected him. Ms. Meisner said something to the effect that he (Mr. Abramowitz) did not know what he was talking about. Ms. Meisner and Mr. Abramowitz raised their voices, and Mr. Abramowitz may have said to Ms. Meisner, "Be quiet." Ms. Meisner was visibly upset and Mr. Abramowitz may have told her to "get out." The comments between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner went back and forth. Mr. Abramowitz pointed at Ms. Meisner; however, it is normal for Mr. Abramowitz to use his arms and hands while speaking. She believed Mr. Abramowitz said he was tired of hearing what Ms. Meisner had to say, but she did not recall if Mr. Abramowitz said anything about removing Ms. Meisner from her position. Mr. Abramowitz stood and told Ms. Meisner not to come back. He said to the man with Ms. Meisner (Mr. Beckwith) not to let her back in. After Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith left the room, Mr. Abramowitz slammed the door and apologized to the people in the room, indicating there were underlying issues between Ms. Meisner and himself. Ms. Dave believed that Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner were both unprofessional, and they should have handled this outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, Ms. Dave indicated that she has never observed Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. Ms. Dave has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, and has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

Testimony of Family Support Services of North Florida, Inc. Director, Family Preservation Lynnea Maystrick

On April 30, 2014, Ms. Maystrick attended a meeting between the Department and FSS. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner engaged in a verbal exchange. Ms. Maystrick believed there was a discussion pertaining to a particular case. Mr. Abramowitz felt one way and Ms. Meisner felt another, possibly concerning how the case was handled. Either Mr. Abramowitz or Ms. Meisner stated, "You think you are always right," to which the other person said, "You think you are always right," and the exchange "went downhill" from there. The comments between Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner continued back and forth and became louder. At one point, Ms. Meisner began to cry. Mr. Abramowitz then stood and asked her to leave, and told her to get out of the meeting and never come back. Ms. Meisner started to leave, and there seemed to be more words exchanged as Ms. Meisner passed Mr. Abramowitz; however, Ms. Maystrick could not hear what was said.

As Mr. Beckwith walked out with Ms. Meisner, Mr. Abramowitz told Mr. Beckwith that he (Mr. Beckwith) now saw what he (Mr. Abramowitz) had to work with in regard to Ms. Meisner. Mr. Abramowitz stated that he did not want Ms. Meisner back again. Mr. Beckwith told Mr. Abramowitz to "calm down" and "grow up." Ms. Meisner and Mr. Beckwith walked out of the room and Mr. Abramowitz slammed the door. The meeting continued, and Mr. Abramowitz stated to the remaining people in the room that they were not allowed to speak to Ms. Meisner again. She did not know if Mr. Abramowitz meant that they could not speak to Ms. Meisner about this meeting, or could not speak to Ms. Meisner in general. She believed that Mr. Abramowitz was normally even-tempered and laid back; however, in this instance, his voice raised and his behavior was unprofessional. She also believed that Ms. Meisner's behavior was unprofessional. When asked if both Mr. Abramowitz and Ms. Meisner raised their voices, Ms. Maystrick stated that it was hard for her (Ms. Maystrick) to say if Ms. Meisner's voice was raised, since Ms. Meisner naturally has an elevated voice that carries and is loud.

In response to questions, Ms. Maystrick indicated that she never noticed if Mr. Abramowitz treated female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments on the appearance of employees, and never heard him make disparaging remarks or use obscene language toward an employee. Ms. Maystrick has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, but noted that Mr. Abramowitz's behavior that day "kind of scared me." She said that when he stood, his chair "went flying and hit the door." He also "slammed the door and was yelling." She opined that Mr. Abramowitz lost control, and "it was definitely a breaking point."

Other Issues Identified

In her written complaint, Ms. Meisner identified four witnesses as examples of females toward whom Mr. Abramowitz behaved unprofessionally. During the investigation, an additional 13 witnesses were identified as having knowledge of alleged unprofessional behavior on the part of Mr. Abramowitz.

Testimony of Children's Legal Services Circuit 4 Supervising Attorney Summer Boyd

On April 25, 2013, Ms. Boyd attended a meeting, on behalf of Ms. Meisner, between Department staff and members of FSS. She was a few minutes late to the meeting. When she entered the room, Mr. Abramowitz commented that Ms. Meisner was "blowing off" his meeting again. During the meeting, she used her Department Blackberry in an attempt to review documents Ms. Meisner sent for the meeting. While she was looking at her Blackberry, Mr. Abramowitz stated that she was probably "telling on me to Ms. Meisner, since you two are like sisters." Mr. Abramowitz made comments during the meeting about CLS, Ms. Meisner, and her (Ms. Boyd). He asked questions about the documents Ms. Meisner sent; however, Ms. Boyd informed him that she had not reviewed the documents prior to the meeting and could not review them on the Blackberry. Mr. Abramowitz stated, "Oh yeah. It is not important to Ms. Meisner." She felt embarrassed that Mr. Abramowitz said those things during the meeting.

She recalls a time (unknown date) when CLS Circuit 4 Senior Attorney Stacey Pellhom was in her office and Mr. Abramowitz walked in. He proceeded to comment on Mr. Beckwith's girlfriend, and indicated that Mr. Beckwith was never in the office. She (Ms. Boyd) commented on how young and attractive Mr. Beckwith's girlfriend was, to which Mr. Abramowitz stated that he would be more interested in her (Ms. Boyd).

She feels that Mr. Abramowitz is condescending and sarcastic toward Ms. Meisner. He says things like, "I know you don't like me and I don't like you." She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz interact with male employees; only males that she considers Mr. Abramowitz's equals. Approximately one-and-a-half years ago, she had weight loss surgery. She believes that one of Mr. Abramowitz's brothers had the same surgery, and whenever she sees Mr. Abramowitz, he seems to lecture her on not gaining the weight back and about working out. He does not speak to her in a lewd manner, he just goes "on and on and on" about not gaining the weight back.

In response to questions, Ms. Boyd indicated that she has never heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language with an employee, but has heard him make jokes about the work habits of employees. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, never felt threatened by him, and her work performance has never suffered as a result of Mr. Abramowitz. She might get "a little more nervous" if he entered a courtroom while she was working.

When asked if the work environment was hostile, she said Mr. Abramowitz may try to create a hostile work environment for the people that report to him; however, he does not supervise CLS staff. She has heard Mr. Abramowitz state that CLS should report to him, and that the system is faulty since he does not oversee CLS. Mr. Abramowitz wants to get his way, is loud, and will "call you out" in front of people to try to get you to concede.

On June 12, 2014, Ms. Boyd contacted the OIG Investigator and indicated CLS Circuit 4 Senior Attorney Tracy Sorcek had information pertaining to comments Mr. Abramowitz made concerning her (Ms. Boyd) and Ms. Meisner.

Testimony of Children's Legal Services Circuit 4 Senior Attorney Stacey Pellhom

Ms. Pellhom was in Ms. Boyd's office (unknown date) with Ms. Boyd and Mr. Abramowitz. She believes that while in Ms. Boyd's office, Mr. Abramowitz may have commented on someone that Mr. Beckwith dated and whether he (Mr. Abramowitz) would have engaged in a relationship with that type of person. She does not recall Mr. Abramowitz's exact words, and she does not recall Mr. Abramowitz making any comments about Mr. Beckwith not being in the office.

In response to questions, Ms. Pellhom stated that since CLS does not report to Mr. Abramowitz, she does not feel that he could affect her job; however, she feels he is overbearing in a personal sense. He speaks loudly and has an influential personality. She has heard Mr. Abramowitz state that he wishes CLS was under him so he had a say in the way CLS operates.

Testimony of Children's Legal Services Circuit 4 Senior Attorney Tracy Sorcek

Ms. Sorcek previously worked in the CLS office in Lake City and then accepted a position with the CLS office in Jacksonville (dates unknown). Before she moved to the Jacksonville office, Mr. Abramowitz was in the Lake City office and she and Mr. Abramowitz discussed her transfer, as well as gyms and working out. Mr. Abramowitz asked if she ever met Ms. Meisner, to which Ms. Sorcek responded, "No." Mr. Abramowitz proceeded to discuss Ms. Meisner's weight, stating Ms. Meisner was obese and kept candy on her desk. He also noted that Ms. Boyd underwent gastric bypass surgery, lost weight, and looked "better." Ms. Sorcek thought the conversation was strange, and even though she was not personally offended, she felt offended for Ms. Meisner and Ms. Boyd. Ms. Sorcek thought Mr. Abramowitz's comments were inappropriate and not comments you would expect a person to make about other people in the workplace. She also indicated that Mr. Abramowitz asked questions about the frequency of Mr. Beckwith's visits to the Lake City office, and he seemed to imply that Mr. Beckwith did not spend enough time in the Lake City office.

In response to questions, Ms. Sorcek indicated that she has never heard Mr. Abramowitz comment on the appearance of employees other than what she previously mentioned, use obscene language with an employee, or seen him throw anything at an employee. She has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz, and her work performance has never suffered as a result of Mr. Abramowitz.

When asked if the work environment was hostile, she said CLS does not report to Mr. Abramowitz and she does not see him with his direct subordinates very often. She can imagine that people are intimidated by Mr. Abramowitz, as "he's big, he is loud, he is domineering, he's brusque."

Testimony of Family Integrity Program Health and Human Services Director Joy Andrews

Ms. Andrews stated that during a meeting (on May 16, 2014, per Ms. Meisner), she had commented that she was not eating lunch because she wanted to lose a little weight, at

which time Mr. Abramowitz commented that she could stand to gain a few pounds. She indicated to the OIG Investigator, in response to questions, that she was not offended by Mr. Abramowitz's comment, did not feel it was condescending, and she took the comment as a joke.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Saponda Lee

Ms. Lee indicated that Mr. Abramowitz once made a comment to her about her weight; however, she considered it a joke and was not offended. She does not recall exactly what Mr. Abramowitz said.

In response to questions, Ms. Lee indicated that she has no knowledge whether Mr. Abramowitz treats male and female employees differently, never heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language, never saw him throw items at employees, and has no first-hand knowledge that Mr. Abramowitz made comments to employees pertaining to their appearance, other than to her about her weight. She has never felt threatened and her work performance has never been adversely impacted by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior. She does not believe the work environment is hostile.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Crystal Tyler

Ms. Tyler does not recall the date, but once in 2012, she walked into Circuit 4 CPIS Jaquambia Roberts' office and Mr. Abramowitz was in the room. She had just returned from maternity leave and had never met Mr. Abramowitz. When she entered the room, Mr. Abramowitz looked at her and made comments about her eyes and hair not being real. She was not offended by his comments. Ms. Roberts then asked Mr. Abramowitz if he knew Ms. Tyler, to which Mr. Abramowitz replied, "I know her. I remember seeing her name on the back of the boys' bathroom door." She was upset and offended by this comment and reported it to Circuit 4 CPIS Clarence Green, who was her supervisor at that time. Later that day, she received a telephone call from Circuit 4 Program Administrator (PA) Sharon Brownlee and subsequently received a telephone call that evening from Mr. Abramowitz, who apologized for his comments.

In response to questions, Ms. Tyler indicated that she has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, and never heard him use disparaging remarks or obscene language. She indicated that other than the comments Mr. Abramowitz made regarding her eyes and hair, and seeing her name on the back of the boys' bathroom door, she has never heard Mr. Abramowitz make inappropriate comments to any other employees. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, never felt physically threatened by him, and her work performance has never been adversely affected by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior. She does not believe the work environment is hostile.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Supervisor Jaquambia Roberts

Ms. Roberts stated that on one occasion, she was in her office with Mr. Abramowitz and other Department employees when Ms. Tyler entered the room. She (Ms. Roberts) said to Mr. Abramowitz, "I bet you don't know who this is." Mr. Abramowitz replied, "I do

know her. I saw her name on the back of the boys' bathroom door." Mr. Abramowitz also made comments about Ms. Tyler's eyes, but Ms. Roberts did not recall exactly what he said. Ms. Roberts did not realize until later that Ms. Tyler was upset by Mr. Abramowitz's comments.

In response to questions, Ms. Roberts indicated that she has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently than male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz make inappropriate comments to employees other than Ms. Tyler, and never heard him use disparaging remarks or direct obscene language at an employee. She has never seen Mr. Abramowitz throw anything at an employee, never felt physically threatened by him, and her work performance has never been adversely affected by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior. She does not believe the work environment is hostile and indicated that Mr. Abramowitz has created a more open environment. He gives employees the opportunity to talk and give their opinions. He listens to the CPIs, and she believes there is now a better atmosphere for communication.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Jennifer Stockman

Ms. Stockman stated that she has heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments to other Department employees that she considered inappropriate, as follows:

- When former Interim Secretary Esther Jacobo¹⁶ was leaving the Department, there was a meeting to introduce Mike Carroll as the new Interim Secretary.¹⁷ During this meeting, Mr. Abramowitz stated that Ms. Jacobo was Cuban and "swam to the United States." Ms. Stockman indicated that her (Ms. Stockman's) father is Cuban, and he did not swim to the United States. Ms. Stockman did not appreciate Mr. Abramowitz's comment.
- When Mr. Abramowitz first became the RMD, he made a comment to a former CPI, who wore her hair in a natural afro. Ms. Stockman did not recall exactly what Mr. Abramowitz said, but she remembers it pertained to the former CPI's hair and remembers that she (Ms. Stockman) considered it racially insensitive.
- In front of a large gathering of employees, she heard Mr. Abramowitz call Circuit 4 CPI Rodney Frederick "Biggie Smalls."¹⁸ She does not know the relationship between Mr. Abramowitz and Mr. Frederick, and does not know if that was Mr. Frederick's nickname.
- She heard that Mr. Abramowitz once told Circuit 4 CPI Selena Wiggins not to wear her hair like "Lil Wayne."¹⁹

In response to questions, Ms. Stockman indicated that she has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently from male employees, never heard Mr.

¹⁶ Esther Jacobo was in the position of Interim Secretary between July 19, 2013 and May 3, 2014.

¹⁷ Mr. Carroll was appointed as Interim Secretary on May 5, 2014.

¹⁸ According to www.nytimes.com, Christopher G. Wallace, now deceased, was a rap artist known as "Biggie Smalls."

¹⁹ According to www.lilwaynehq.com, Dwayne Michael Carter, Jr. is a rap artist from New Orleans known as "Lil Wayne."

Abramowitz use obscene language or derogatory comments toward employees except as previously mentioned, and has never seen him throw anything at employees. She has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz and her job performance has never been adversely affected by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior.

When asked if Mr. Abramowitz has created a hostile work environment, Ms. Stockman stated that Mr. Abramowitz makes some people feel uncomfortable. She noted that people have accepted his "off the cuff" remarks, and that his behavior is not going to change.

Ms. Stockman said that she has been with the Department for nine years, and is afraid that she will be retaliated against for providing this information.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Rodney Frederick

When Mr. Frederick was in training, Mr. Abramowitz called him "Biggie Smalls." Although he did not believe Mr. Abramowitz was trying to be mean, he (Mr. Frederick) did not care for the comment and was offended. On another occasion, a large group of employees were in the atrium area of the building planting "pinwheels."²⁰ Mr. Abramowitz was present and called him "Big Pop"²¹ or "Biggie Smalls" in front of the other employees.

In response to questions, Mr. Frederick indicated that he has never seen Mr. Abramowitz treat female employees differently from male employees, and noted Mr. Abramowitz "pretty much treats everyone fairly." He has never seen Mr. Abramowitz behave in an unprofessional manner, never heard Mr. Abramowitz comment on an employee's appearance, never heard him use obscene language or derogatory comments toward other employees, and has never seen him throw anything at employees. He has never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz and his job performance has never been negatively affected by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior. He does not believe Mr. Abramowitz has created a hostile work environment.

Testimony of Circuit 4 Child Protective Investigator Selena Wiggins

Ms. Wiggins stated that Mr. Abramowitz has never made a comment to her that she considered inappropriate. Mr. Abramowitz once told her not to wear her hair like "Lil Wayne," but she did not believe his statement was malicious or bigoted.

In response to questions, Ms. Wiggins indicated that she never noticed if Mr. Abramowitz treated female employees differently from male employees, never heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language or derogatory comments toward employees, and has never seen him throw anything at employees. She never saw Mr. Abramowitz behave in an unprofessional manner, never heard Mr. Abramowitz comment on the appearance of other employees, and never felt threatened by Mr. Abramowitz's

²⁰ The Department used pinwheels to show support for child abuse prevention month in April 2014.

²¹ Based on the recorded interview, it could not be determined with certainty whether Mr. Frederick said "Big Pop" or "Big Poppa."

behavior. Her work performance has never been adversely impacted by Mr. Abramowitz's behavior and she does not believe the work environment is hostile.

Testimony of Circuit 7 Program Administrator Elsie Bellevue

Mr. Abramowitz made several comments that Ms. Bellevue considered inappropriate:

- On June 10, 2014, she and Mr. Abramowitz had a telephone conversation regarding the Department dress code, since one of her CPIs had recently worn blue jeans to work. Mr. Abramowitz stated, "I bet you those hos are still wearing stilettos." She felt Mr. Abramowitz was referring to female CPIs when he used the word "hos" and she was offended because she wears high heels.
- Approximately one-and-a-half years ago, she was speaking to Mr. Abramowitz on the telephone on a Saturday night. Mr. Abramowitz asked if she was married, and in response she told Mr. Abramowitz she had a boyfriend. Mr. Abramowitz said, "You should go to your boyfriend and 'get some.'" She indicated that she was offended by his comment.
- She interviewed applicants for a CPIS position and selected Eunice Cruz over Latika Burkes. Ms. Bellevue was subsequently contacted by Ms. Burkes, who stated she (Ms. Burkes) was contacted by Circuit 7 CPI April Scott. Ms. Scott indicated that she spoke to Mr. Abramowitz on the telephone and he stated, "Aren't you glad that Eunice Cruz got the position." Ms. Bellevue indicated that Ms. Cruz is Hispanic and Ms. Burkes is black.
- At one time, a female CPI complained that she felt uncomfortable around a male CPI. The male CPI eventually left the Department. During a subsequent telephone conversation, Mr. Abramowitz asked Ms. Bellevue if she had the male CPI's telephone number because he (Mr. Abramowitz) needed the male CPI to come and "molest my wife."
- During a meeting²² with Community Partnership for Children, Inc. (CPC),²³ Mr. Abramowitz looked at her and stated, "What is that, a bird's nest in your hair?" She responded, "David, you do not talk about a black girl's hair." She did not appreciate his comment and was embarrassed.

In response to questions, Ms. Bellevue indicated that she believed Mr. Abramowitz does treat female employees differently from male employees. Ms. Bellevue has never heard Mr. Abramowitz speak that way about a male employee. She has never heard Mr. Abramowitz use obscene language directly toward an employee, but has heard him say, "God darn it." She has never seen him throw anything at an employee and has never felt physically threatened by Mr. Abramowitz; however, she has felt emotionally threatened. She believed that her job performance has been adversely impacted by Mr.

²² In a follow-up telephone conversation with the OIG Investigator, Ms. Bellevue identified [CPC Director of Case Management] Kellie McKenzie, [CPC Chief Operating Officer] Karin Flositz, [CPC Director of Clinical Services] Christian "Chrissy" Curtis, and [CLS Circuit 7 Managing Attorney] Slade Dukes as attendees at the April 29, 2014 meeting.

²³ Community Partnership for Children, Inc. (CPC) is a CBC lead agency for Flagler, Putnam, and Volusia Counties.

Abramowitz, stating, "He trumps you when decisions are made." When asked if Mr. Abramowitz has created a hostile work environment, Ms. Bellevue replied that the work environment is emotionally hostile. She has lost sleep and cried, but has learned to deal with it.

Testimony of Community Partnership for Children, Inc. Director of Case Management Kellie McKenzie

On April 29, 2014, Ms. McKenzie was present for a meeting between the Department and CPC. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz made a comment to Ms. Bellevue about her hair. She does not recall exactly what Mr. Abramowitz said, but when asked if he said something about a "bird's nest," Ms. McKenzie replied that she thought he did. She indicated that Ms. Bellevue said something back to Mr. Abramowitz, but she did not know what was said. She did not believe Ms. Bellevue was upset; however, she was uncertain. She believed that Mr. Abramowitz does cross boundaries, but she does not take it personally.

Testimony of Community Partnership for Children, Inc. Chief Operating Officer Karin Flositz

On April 29, 2014, Ms. Flositz was present for a meeting between the Department and CPC. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz made a comment to Ms. Bellevue about her hair. She does not recall exactly what Mr. Abramowitz said, but she remembers Mr. Abramowitz used the words "bird's nest." Ms. Bellevue responded to Mr. Abramowitz by stating that "you don't talk about a black girl's hair." She got the feeling that Ms. Bellevue was "ruffled" by the comment and probably a little upset. Ms. Flositz noted that sometimes in the meetings there are "barbs" back and forth in a joking manner, and that day there were other comments about hair from other people, not just Mr. Abramowitz.

Testimony of Community Partnership for Children, Inc. Director of Clinical Services Christian "Chrissy" Curtis

On April 29, 2014, Ms. Curtis was present for a meeting between the Department and CPC. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz made a comment to Ms. Bellevue about her new hairstyle. She does not recall exactly what Mr. Abramowitz said, but Ms. Bellevue laughed and responded that "you don't talk about a black girl's hair." When asked if Mr. Abramowitz said something about a "bird's nest," Ms. Curtis stated it was possible, but she does not remember that exactly. Ms. Curtis indicated that Ms. Bellevue seemed "jovial" and did not appear upset by Mr. Abramowitz's comment.

Testimony of Children's Legal Services Circuit 7 Managing Attorney Slade Dukes

On April 29, 2014, Mr. Dukes was present for a meeting between the Department and CPC. During the meeting, Mr. Abramowitz made a comment to Ms. Bellevue about her hair; however, he does not recall specifically what Mr. Abramowitz said. Mr. Dukes remembered that Ms. Bellevue responded to Mr. Abramowitz by stating "you know you're not supposed to comment about black people's hair." When asked if Mr. Abramowitz said something to Ms. Bellevue about a "bird's nest" in her hair, Mr. Dukes

replied, "Yes." After Mr. Abramowitz's comment, Ms. Bellevue was very stoic; she did not laugh, but she did smirk, smile, and at one point just looked at Mr. Abramowitz. After Mr. Abramowitz made the comment about Ms. Bellevue's hair, other people in the room said, "Really, David."

Testimony of Circuit 7 Child Protective Investigator April Scott

Ms. Scott never heard Mr. Abramowitz make an inappropriate comment to her or to another employee. Mr. Abramowitz called her (unknown date) and discussed upcoming opportunities for Senior CPI positions, and stated that Eunice Cruz was selected for a CPIS position. She does not recall exactly what Mr. Abramowitz stated, and she does not remember him saying Ms. Cruz was selected over another employee.

Testimony of Circuit 7 Child Protective Investigator Latika Burkes

Ms. Burkes once received a telephone call (unknown date) from Ms. Scott, who indicated that she received a telephone call from Mr. Abramowitz, who stated that other people like her (Ms. Scott) were coming on board and that "someone like you" (Ms. Scott) was just hired (meaning Ms. Cruz). To Ms. Burkes' knowledge, Mr. Abramowitz never said "white," but "implied it." Ms. Burkes noted that Ms. Cruz has more experience than her (Ms. Burkes), but Ms. Scott did not like Mr. Abramowitz's comments. Ms. Burkes subsequently telephoned Circuit 7 CPIS Crystal Holmes, and while Ms. Holmes was on speakerphone, Ms. Burkes asked Ms. Scott to come into the office and tell Ms. Holmes what Mr. Abramowitz had said, which Ms. Scott did.

In response to questions, Ms. Burkes stated that she has heard Mr. Abramowitz make comments in meetings about "hoochie mama's wearing high heels," and noted that Mr. Abramowitz calls himself "Big Poppa." She does not consider the work environment to be hostile, and she has never had a bad rapport with Mr. Abramowitz.

Testimony of Circuit 7 Child Protective Investigator April Scott²⁴

Ms. Scott believes she called either Ms. Burkes or Circuit 7 CPIS Jackwylin Davis (her direct supervisor), or perhaps both of them, to tell them that Mr. Abramowitz called her and she thought it was odd that he did that. She does not remember, but Mr. Abramowitz must have said something she thought was "off," and she thinks she said something about that to either Ms. Burkes or Ms. Davis. She does not know if Mr. Abramowitz said Ms. Cruz was white, or something like that, but she told Mr. Abramowitz that Ms. Cruz was actually Hispanic. She does not feel that Mr. Abramowitz said anything inappropriate, but she honestly cannot say because she does not remember the entire conversation. She does not think Mr. Abramowitz made a racist remark, but he said something that made her disclose that Ms. Cruz was Hispanic. She does not think anything was wrong with what Mr. Abramowitz said to her; it was just a conversation she had with Mr. Abramowitz, and he did not say, "I hired a white person." He did not say anything she thought was inappropriate. If she had thought he said something wrong, she would have remembered it.

²⁴ Upon completion of the interview of Ms. Burkes, the OIG Investigator re-interviewed Ms. Scott on June 18, 2014.

Her parents were missionaries in Nigeria and she grew up all over the world. She never noticed a difference in people because of the color of their skin, and it would anger her if she saw anyone doing that, one way or another. She is not trying to defend Mr. Abramowitz or get him in trouble. Her telephone conversation with Mr. Abramowitz was not recent, and she does not want to say something that is not correct or something that did not happen, because her memory is not that good. She was not called into Ms. Burkes' office to repeat her conversation with Mr. Abramowitz, and she does not remember ever going into Ms. Burkes' office and discussing her telephone call with Mr. Abramowitz while somebody else was on the telephone.

Testimony of Northeast Regional Managing Director David Abramowitz²⁵

On April 30, 2014, Mr. Abramowitz led a meeting between FSS and Department staff. Ms. Meisner was in attendance at the meeting. He and Ms. Meisner probably do not have the best history, the meeting was two-and-a-half months ago, and he probably does not remember everything about the exchange with Ms. Meisner, which occurred near the end of the meeting. In the past, when a child with disabilities turned 18 years old, the child became a client of the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD)²⁶ and received the services APD provided. Now, children can choose to remain in Extended Foster Care until they are 22 or 23 years old, and he wants to make sure the children are getting the best care. Approximately two months before the April 30, 2014 meeting, Mr. Digre sent a note to the Regional Managing Directors indicating that he (Mr. Digre) wanted to make sure children who were 17 to 18 years old and in that situation received a guardian, so the guardian can make an informed decision. If a guardian recommended that the child "opt out" of Extended Foster Care and become a client of APD, the child received services from APD. During the meeting, there was a discussion of a particular child who was 17.5 years old. Mr. Abramowitz was speaking to Mr. Kaywork and asked, "Where are we at maybe looking at a guardian for this kid?" Ms. Meisner then asked, "Why are you getting a guardian?" He explained to Ms. Meisner that he wanted to make sure they were doing the right thing for the child, and he believed everyone else in the room understood what he was talking about. Ms. Meisner then said, "You cannot make decisions for the kid. You cannot make that call." He responded, "I am not making the call for the kid. I am trying to do what is best for the kid." At that time, Ms. Meisner started crying.

He did not think he was yelling, but noted he is a "forceful guy." He stated that he is not a yeller; he does not yell, but he has a deep voice. He told Ms. Meisner that he cared for the children and was doing his best, to which Ms. Meisner stated he "can't do that" and left the meeting. Her direct supervisor, Mr. Beckwith, left the meeting with her. During his discussion with Ms. Meisner, Mr. Kaywork said, "Dave, we got this. We got it." Mr. Abramowitz felt that Mr. Kaywork knew he (Mr. Abramowitz) was getting frustrated because the discussion was between FSS and him (Mr. Abramowitz). As Ms. Meisner left the room, Mr. Abramowitz stood and said, "I don't want you in any more of my meetings. You are not value added. I don't want you here anymore." He then

²⁵ Mr. Abramowitz's statement presented in this report, unless quoted, is a paraphrased statement.

²⁶ According to their website, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD) works in partnership with local communities and private providers to assist people who have developmental disabilities and their families.

closed the door. He apologized to the remaining people in the meeting, saying, "Some of you don't know me. I apologize for this. That is not me. I am about the children and the families. You guys should not have seen that. It won't occur again. The bottom line is we are about the kids and about the families. That is an issue between us." The meeting went on for another five minutes then concluded.

His personal feeling is that Ms. Meisner was being insubordinate, and it was not the first time. He believed it is very hard to disagree with Ms. Meisner because she comes across as a "big bully" a lot of the time, and it causes a lot of problems in the Northeast Region. After the meeting, Mr. Beckwith came into his office and asked if "we" (Mr. Abramowitz and Mr. Beckwith) were okay. He explained to Mr. Beckwith that the situation with Ms. Meisner has been occurring for two-and-a-half years; Ms. Meisner cuts people off in meetings, and she stymies and stifles discussions because she is "a bully." Mr. Abramowitz let Ms. Meisner know his opinion in the meeting, she disagreed (in what he believed was an insubordinate way), and she walked out of the meeting. He did not kick her out of the meeting. When she walked out of the meeting, he said, "That is it. You are no longer invited to these meetings. I don't want you here because you don't add any value to these meetings." He has had several people tell him they were appreciative of his actions.

The incident at the meeting occurred on "something that really should not have happened." The issue was a 17-year-old child the Department was trying to take care of, and he and Ms. Meisner disagreed on something. Mr. Abramowitz was sure it was a communications issue, because he is sure that Ms. Meisner cares about children. Mr. Abramowitz's perception was that Ms. Meisner was trying to show people in the room that she is in charge, and that he (Mr. Abramowitz) does not know what he is talking about. Mr. Abramowitz took it as Ms. Meisner being herself, and she has been doing it for two-and-a-half years. Usually, "everyone just quiets down and she goes into her thing and I usually just go, 'next topic.'" But this time he said, "What?" The perception was that he didn't take care of the child and that he did not know what he was talking about.

He did not remember asking Ms. Meisner to leave the meeting. He remembers her getting up and leaving. He would have let the meeting continue, but she got up and walked out. It was her decision to leave. When she stood to leave, he was taken aback. He felt bad for the organization, because they do not need to see the "Regional Director, or her, or this happen." There was a meeting that was needed, and this detracted from the intent of the meeting. He felt bad personally, but he did not yell. He believed that how he was currently speaking²⁷ was as loud as he spoke during that meeting. He indicated that there was no yelling and no screaming. He was firm and said, "Ms. Meisner. I care for this kid; I am not making that kid's decision. It is the guardian who is making the decision." According to Mr. Abramowitz, he is a pretty passionate person. What he thought was not yelling, somebody else may have thought was yelling. Mr. Abramowitz stated, "I mean, I can get mad, but that was not me getting angry, it was me being passionate and me being passionate on my beliefs on what I

²⁷ During the interview, Mr. Abramowitz spoke in a conversational tone.

thought at the time.” When Mr. Beckwith left the meeting with Ms. Meisner, Mr. Beckwith said something to him about acting like he was in the ninth or tenth grade, but he does not remember saying anything in response. He does not remember waving his arms in an aggressive manner, and he indicated that he closed the door, but did not slam it. He then returned to his seat and apologized to the remaining meeting attendees. The next day, he spoke to Mr. Kaywork on the telephone and Mr. Kaywork stated, “she pushed your buttons and pushed them too far.”

He does not remember saying anything to Ms. Meisner pertaining to being tired of hearing what she had to say; however, he indicated that he was pretty frustrated. He did not say he wanted her out of her current position. The comment he said to her was, “I don’t want you at any more of these meetings. You are not value added. You are not going to be at any more of these meetings.” After the meeting ended and prior to his private conversation with Mr. Beckwith, there was another meeting he attended that day, as did Ms. Meisner. He heard Ms. Meisner make a couple of comments, and he spoke up saying he agreed with her.

Mr. Abramowitz indicated that he does not hold any grudges. He assumed there would be a “cooling off” period and then he, Mr. Beckwith, Ms. O’Sullivan, and maybe Mr. Digre would all get together and talk this out; however, the next day, he received a telephone call from Interim Secretary Mike Carroll asking what had happened.

He does not believe his actions at any time during the April 30, 2014 meeting were unprofessional, but added, “It won’t happen again.” He said he was a soldier for 30 years, and in a military environment, things like this occur on a daily or weekly basis where people disagree with each other but nobody walks out of a meeting. What he learned is he will “never, ever get in a situation like this ever again.”

When informed that witnesses indicated they believed his actions were unprofessional, Mr. Abramowitz stated:

Well, if they thought I was unprofessional, then I was. If that was their perception that I was, then I need to take responsibility for my actions and it is the reason why at the end I apologized to them on what had occurred. A lot of people in that room don’t know me and don’t know my heart. I would like to think, and I don’t know if this is the right thing, I would like to think the same thing they thought of her but that is not the issue here. The issue is me. So if they felt that way, even if one person who felt like I was unprofessional, then the bottom line is I was. And the bottom line is, I need to learn from that and I need to be able to do that.

Mr. Abramowitz stated that, looking back, he could have handled it differently. After Ms. Meisner’s first question, he should have said, “We can talk about it afterwards separately.” He has not spoken to Ms. Meisner since the meeting, but has sent her four or five e-mails related to work. He did receive a letter from a former CLS employee

thanking Ms. Meisner for an unrelated issue, and he sent Ms. Meisner an e-mail thanking her for the “awesome job” she did.

When he first met Ms. Meisner two-and-a-half years ago, he, Ms. Meisner, and Mr. Beckwith were talking about a topic and he (Mr. Abramowitz) disagreed with Ms. Meisner. Ms. Meisner started to cry, and he asked her what was wrong. Ms. Meisner stated that he (Mr. Abramowitz) did not respect her and did not respect her opinions. He explained to Ms. Meisner that just because he disagreed with her opinion did not mean he did not respect her. He never understood why she became upset, but realized that he could not have a discussion with her unless he agreed with her. He rarely talked to her after that, and at one point, she told him that he does not like working with women. He explained to her that he has worked with women his whole life and he respects women. He believes that he is a different type of leader than she has ever seen, and maybe she is not used to his style. There are two other CLS Managing Attorneys in the Northeast Region, one female and one male, and he talks to them all of the time. Six of his nine direct reports are female. He does not think he has engaged in gender discrimination.

In regard to information provided by witnesses and the anonymous complainant, Mr. Abramowitz offered the following:

Ms. Boyd probably did attend meetings in place of Ms. Meisner; however, he does not remember telling Ms. Boyd that Ms. Meisner was “blowing off” his meeting. He also does not remember saying anything to Ms. Boyd about how she was “telling on him” because she and Ms. Meisner were like sisters; however, Mr. Abramowitz noted that he could probably see himself saying it. He noted that Ms. Meisner and Ms. Boyd “are tight, thick as thieves, and really good friends.” If he did say anything, he “probably did not say it in a negative way.”

He did speak to Ms. Boyd about Mr. Beckwith’s girlfriend, approximately two years ago. Mr. Beckwith was dating a woman in Jacksonville and he (Mr. Abramowitz) made the comment that Mr. Beckwith was hanging out in Jacksonville all the time with his girlfriend. His comment was made as a joke; however, Mr. Beckwith called him within two hours and asked why he (Mr. Abramowitz) was talking bad about him (Mr. Beckwith). He explained to Mr. Beckwith that he was joking and it is his personality to use a lot of humor. Mr. Beckwith seemed fine with the explanation. Mr. Abramowitz noted that he was trying to build a relationship with Ms. Boyd and it backfired. He does not remember saying anything to Ms. Boyd about being more interested in her than Mr. Beckwith’s girlfriend, and cannot see himself saying it. He has been married to his wife for 31 years and she is the only person he has ever loved.

Approximately two years ago, he spoke to Ms. Boyd about weight loss surgery. He thought it occurred when Ms. Boyd was getting ready for the surgery and he told her his personal thoughts, which were if an individual can lose the weight through good eating, he would do that rather than the surgery. He explained that his brother had the surgery and it worked for him; however, after the surgery, the person must follow the regimen or

they could gain the weight back. He believed he was speaking to her from the perspective of a friend. He did not believe he had any other conversations with Ms. Boyd about the surgery, other than to tell her she looked good because she had lost a lot of weight. In his mind, he never said anything derogatory to Ms. Boyd and did not feel he ever lectured her about the weight loss and the importance of keeping the weight off.

He felt he treated male and female employees the same way and he did not feel he ever discriminated against a female employee. He previously made comments to employees about their physical appearance, approximately two-and-a-half years ago. He would say, "you look nice, you have nice hair, nice clothes." He indicated it was the way he was raised. Everything he said was in a positive manner, and he included male and female employees in his comments. He was advised by his former supervisor, (former Assistant Secretary for Operations) John Cooper, that he should not do that anymore because some people might take it the wrong way.

When asked if he knew Mr. Frederick, Mr. Abramowitz stated, "Big fellow, Big Poppa." He referred to Mr. Frederick as "Big Poppa" because "he looks like Biggie Smalls, who is a rap artist." Whenever he sees Mr. Frederick, he says, "Big Poppa." Mr. Abramowitz even calls himself "Big Poppa." Mr. Frederick is "a big dude, is a great guy, and is a great CPI." He did not realize Mr. Frederick was offended by the nickname and indicated he does not need to say that anymore. Mr. Abramowitz stated he had "nicknames for people," but when asked for other examples, Mr. Abramowitz indicated he had the nickname for Mr. Frederick and he would not use it anymore (no additional examples were provided).

He recalled speaking to Ms. Bellevue about CPIs wearing blue jeans to work. He believed that the CPIs should dress depending on the community in which the CPI worked. If people in the community mostly wore blue jeans, he did not have a problem if the CPIs working in that community wore blue jeans while working. He subsequently learned that he spoke out of line, and contacted Ms. Bellevue to retract his comment. While speaking to Ms. Bellevue, he did state something about the "hos still wearing stilettos." Mr. Abramowitz explained that he is very concerned about the CPIs wearing seven-inch or eight-inch high heels because they might hurt themselves by spraining their ankles. He is also concerned what the perception is in the field, and that the CPIs are not out there to get a date. In using the term "hos," he was "talking about the gals that dress themselves like street walkers. I don't need that. I don't want that."

He did state something to Ms. Bellevue about "'getting some' from her boyfriend." He explained that he said it because he was trying to build a relationship with her and he was trying to "loosen her up." He noted that Ms. Bellevue is "very tight" and does not have a good relationship with her CPIs. Ms. Bellevue's weakness is that she does not know how to relate to her CPIs; he was trying to get Ms. Bellevue to "relax." The conversation was one-on-one, on the telephone, and he and Ms. Bellevue were both laughing. He was just trying to say, "I love the way you work. I just want you to try to

get more engaging with your people to be able to get to know them.” He did not believe that Ms. Bellevue was offended by his comment.

Mr. Abramowitz acknowledged that, during a telephone conversation with Ms. Bellevue, he did tell her that he needed the telephone number of a former CPI, so that the former CPI could come and “molest” his wife. He did so in humor, and Ms. Bellevue laughed and participated in the conversation. He was trying to get Ms. Bellevue to “loosen up” and feel comfortable talking to him because her relationship with her CPIs is bad. He was trying to get Ms. Bellevue to open up, and “obviously she took it wrong.”

Ms. Bellevue wears different hairdos all the time, and he does not remember saying anything to her about a “bird’s nest” in her hair. He can see himself saying, “Wow, you got a different hairdo again. It looks nice.” Even though he could not remember saying anything to Ms. Bellevue about a “bird’s nest” in her hair, he stated, “If she (Ms. Bellevue) said I said it, I probably said it.” Mr. Abramowitz noted that if he did say it, it was probably in jest and he probably added that it looked really nice. He would never put anybody down.

He knows Ms. Scott, but he does not remember ever speaking with Ms. Scott about Ms. Cruz being selected for the CPIS position. He could not understand why he would speak to Ms. Scott about who was chosen for the CPIS position.

When asked if he made comments to Ms. Sorcek about Ms. Meisner, Mr. Abramowitz stated he would not do that and he never talked to anyone about Ms. Meisner’s weight. He said “there is no way I would say that to somebody.”

He does not remember speaking to Ms. Sorcek about Ms. Boyd’s weight loss. He does remember speaking to someone who was moving from Lake City to Jacksonville, and that he told the person they would really like working in Jacksonville.

He met Ms. Lee approximately two-and-a-half years ago. She was skinny and he told her she needed to eat more. He worked on a case with her and took her out to eat. He remembered making a comment about getting more food in her, but does not recall any comment about a cheeseburger.

He knows Ms. Andrews and made a comment to her. Ms. Andrews had a baby approximately six or seven months ago. When he saw her recently, he told her she looked great and that she looked “awesome.” He does not remember exactly what he said, but he probably did state that she could stand to gain a few pounds. He did not remember saying anything to former Interim Secretary Jacobo about being Cuban and swimming to the United States. If he did say anything to her, it was done in humor. Former Interim Secretary Jacobo is one of his closest friends and he had love and respect for the work she did for the Department. He does not see any humor in the comment that he reportedly made; he does not understand why he would say that; and he cannot see himself saying it.

He once told a former CPI not to wear her hair like “Lil Wayne”; however, the CPI was not Ms. Wiggins. The former CPI no longer works for the Department and was not with the Department for very long. Her hair was “real high and unprofessional,” and he called her “Lil Wayne,” who is a male rap artist.

He knows Ms. Tyler; however, he does not remember ever making a comment about her hair and eyes. He also does not remember saying that he saw her name on the back of the restroom door, and he cannot believe he would say something like that. If he did say something like that, it would be something he said in jest to initiate communication with her. He subsequently stated, “I don’t remember that; I don’t remember that comment. But you know with my flippant attitude and my ‘no filter,’ me coming quickly trying to get humor in there, the point would have been is I am just trying to make humor by going, ‘Hey, I didn’t know you, I just saw your name.’” He does not remember calling Ms. Tyler to apologize, but on five or six other occasions, he said something to someone, that after he thought about it (“because the employees are civilians and not soldiers”), he felt crossed the line. He then called the person and told them he wanted to apologize. His overall intent is not to hurt anybody. His intent is to make people feel comfortable around the organization “like a family.” He noted that if people do not feel comfortable, there is a real problem and he has to fix it. He does not remember anyone calling him to tell him that Ms. Tyler was upset. When asked if Ms. Brownlee called him about this situation, he replied that if Ms. Brownlee said she called him, then Ms. Brownlee did. He then would have called Ms. Tyler to apologize, but he does not remember.

He does not use obscene language with staff. He does not use the “f-word,” the “s-word,” and he probably used the “a-word once or twice.” He has probably used derogatory language on the telephone when speaking to individuals, but apologized afterward, noting the language “slipped out.” He has used obscene language in his office while on the telephone with someone outside the Department who is close to him. He does not use profanity, but every once in a while in one-on-one conversation, the “s-word” will come out, but he probably has not used it more than 10 times in two-and-a-half years. The “f-word” has not been used but once or twice, and he does not use “G.D.” at all.

When asked if he has ever thrown anything at an employee, Mr. Abramowitz replied, “No. The answer is I do not throw things at employees.”

His perception of a hostile work environment is when people around him do not feel comfortable in their setting. They cannot speak, and anything they say or do can impact their career or position. He does not feel that he has created a hostile work environment. He wants the Northeast Region to have free and open discussions. He is focused on accountability and believes that if someone is not accountable, that person will view him as demanding. He is demanding when it comes to families and employees taking care of their clients, but he does not believe that creates a hostile work environment.

He believed that, in the last two-and-a-half years, he has become more sensitive in his demeanor with employees. There is a transition coming from the military to civilian life, and his first year was a difficult transition for him. He walked into the position thinking everyone followed his heart and no one would outwork him in the organization. He assumed that everyone would see his work, how driven he was, and that he would do anything for anyone in the organization. He stated, "In my previous 30 years in the military, my mouth, I was always kept out of trouble because the people around me would protect me." When he came to the Department with his "lack of filter," it was tough; he was getting letters with comments like the ones mentioned during the interview. Those letters affected him because he never wanted to hurt anybody's feelings. He believed he has matured. His intent was to always make people feel comfortable so they can come and talk to him about any topic. He would like to think he has improved in the past year and will continue to do so. He was told that he should not comment on the way people look, but it is in his nature and he was raised to tell people they look nice. He stated, "But my filter, my mouth, I say things sometimes that if I thought about it, I probably would not say." He indicated that he has to treat everybody so they are all on the same playing field, and he has to work on it. His intent was never to demean anyone. He usually did not make fun of anybody in a big group and if he did, it was somebody he really liked, who knew him really well, stating, "If I make fun of you it is because I like you." He noted that if you look at his nature for the past two-and-a-half years, he has improved but is "not there yet." He was in the army for 30 years, never had an equal opportunity complaint, and never had any complaints like this one. He has been with the Department for two-and-a-half years and has had complaints filed against him.

In conclusion, Mr. Abramowitz stated:

I would say if you did a survey of 1,200 people in [the Department] in this region, my sense is they know me. They understand me and I would sense that they care, but some of the questions are concerning to me because I have to re-look at myself and have to re-direct how I am going about engaging people because I am obviously going about it wrong. Because if I am upsetting them, in a way that is upsetting them, that is not good. That is not my intent and I was wrong.

Opinion of the Office of Civil Rights

In a memorandum dated July 31, 2014, Human Resources Administrator for Civil Rights Carolyn Dudley stated, "Based on testimonial evidence it is the opinion of this office that there is insufficient evidence to indicate that a violation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, has occurred."

INSPECTOR GENERAL'S COMMENTS

Based on witness testimony, the allegation that Northeast Regional Managing Director David Abramowitz created a hostile work environment is *not supported*.

Based on witness testimony, the allegation that Northeast Regional Managing Director David Abramowitz engaged in gender discrimination against a female employee is *not supported*.

The testimony of the witnesses revealed several examples of comments attributed to Mr. Abramowitz that the witnesses felt were not appropriate for a Department employee. At a meeting held on April 30, 2014, Ms. Meisner and witnesses described comments made and behavior exhibited by Mr. Abramowitz. Mr. Abramowitz admitted to saying to Ms. Meisner, "I don't want you in any more of my meetings. You are not value added. I don't want you here anymore." Several witnesses indicated that Mr. Abramowitz yelled at Ms. Meisner during the meeting and slammed the door when she left the room. Mr. Abramowitz did not think he was yelling, but admitted that he has a deep voice and is a "forceful guy." Several witnesses stated Mr. Abramowitz's behavior in the meeting was unprofessional, and Mr. Abramowitz, when informed of those statements, replied, "[i]f they thought I was unprofessional, then I was."

In addition to comments made and behavior exhibited by Mr. Abramowitz at the April 30, 2014 meeting, witnesses described other comments made by Mr. Abramowitz, some of which Mr. Abramowitz admitted making, that the witnesses considered inappropriate and/or unprofessional. When questioned, Mr. Abramowitz denied making some of the comments, and explained for others that it is part of his personality to use a lot of humor, and his intent is to help people open up and make them feel comfortable around the organization, "like a family."

Based upon the comments made by Mr. Abramowitz, it is recommended that the Deputy Secretary review this report and ensure that Mr. Abramowitz receives, at a minimum, appropriate training, and that the Deputy Secretary take any other action deemed appropriate.

This investigation has been conducted in accordance with the ASSOCIATION OF INSPECTORS GENERAL Principles & Quality Standards for Investigations.