

EXHIBIT H

From: Clifthorne, Sarah (COM)
Sent: Friday, April 3, 2026 4:52 PM
To: 'Melannie Denise Cunningham' ; Nobles, Sen. T'wina

Subject: RE: The Community Deserves Excellence, Not Minimums: Re: Procurement Integrity Analysis - Charles Mitchell and George Washington Bush Study on Reparative Action

Dear Senator Nobles, Representative Leavitt, and constituents,

I always appreciate people asking additional questions and reminders on how important the work is that has been entrusted to Commerce. **The Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA) guides the study's direction, community engagement strategy and research accountability. Commerce's role is to support the Commission by procuring and securing a contract for an organization with whom the Commission will work. Ultimately, the organization that was selected through the competitive contracting procurement process was the organization that received the highest score.**

Below are answers to Melanie Denise Cunningham's additional 7 questions. Additionally, [Commerce's website](#) will be continuously updated with information specific to our role (overseeing the contract). Our [Contractor's website](#) is frequently updated with information about the research team and how to get involved, including upcoming community information meetings. Last, the Commission on African American Affairs posts its public meetings and agendas on [their site](#). Updates on this project are shared there, and meetings always include opportunity for public comment.

1. The Scoring Panel

The Commission on African American Affairs assembled the scoring panel for this procurement process. The scoring panel included the following scorers:

1. **Michael Bailey**, Deputy Director, City of Seattle Human Services
2. **Derick Harris**, Executive Director, Black Education Strategy Roundtable
3. **Dr. Auzimuth Jackson**, Equity and Social Justice Strategic Advisor, Washington State House of Representatives
4. **Dr. Marcus Johnson**, Teaching Associate, Foster School of Business, University of Washington
5. **Ashly McBunch**, Contracts and Equity Manager, Washington State Department of Commerce
6. **Ed Prince**, Executive Director, Washington State Commission on African American Affairs
7. **Paula Sardinias**, President/CEO, FMS Global Strategies
8. **Reverend Dr. Linda Smith**, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Baptist Church, Renton

EXHIBIT H

9. **Joseph Todd**, Chair of Washington State Commission on African American Affairs, Deputy City Manager, City of Bellevue

2. The Quarantined Proposal

After confirming Dr. Hunter's proposal was blocked by WaTech, we were able to receive and share Dr. Hunter's proposal with the review panel. The same panel of reviewers that scored the other applications fully reviewed and scored Dr. Hunter's application using the same criteria as all other proposals. We extended the time available for reviewers to ensure full review of Dr. Hunter's proposal.

3. The Nature of the Security Flag

Commerce was notified by the WaTech that statewide IT security protocols flagged a URL as malicious that was included in Dr. Hunter's proposal email. This blocked the email from reaching Commerce. The proposal could only be released after a review by WaTech.

4. Truclusion's Qualifications

All proposals reviewed met minimum qualifications and all proposals included an assembled team of experts and researchers to carry out this work. Through a robust competitive scoring process, Truclusion's proposal received the highest score. All proposals were scored by the same evaluators against the same evaluation rubric.

5. The Distribution List

The Request for Proposals (RFP) was posted on the public Commerce website which is our primary method for distributing all opportunities at Commerce. This is the method by which Commerce distributes all grant opportunities under our agency's statutory authority and agency policy. The additional solicitation list of 100+ organizations was based on extensive work during the RFP design process by the Community Services Division. This included researching firms and researchers engaged in reparations studies in other states and local jurisdictions, as well as consultation with members of WENA, Commission on African American Affairs, Seattle King County African American Reparations Committee (SAARC), and others.

6. The Debrief Notification and the Law

Commerce receives its authority to award contracts for grants, loans or pass-through funding through our two enabling Chapters, 43.31 RCW and 43.330 RCW, not Chapter 39.26 RCW which covers Department of Enterprise Services (DES). "Grants & Loans" are contracts that provide funding for projects and/or programs in the community intended to achieve a public purpose, commonly called grants, loans, or pass-through funding. This RFP, as is typical at Commerce, required a debrief request within 3 days of the "Unsuccessful Proposer Notification". Dr. Hunter received his "Unsuccessful Proposer Notification" on November 18, 2025. Dr. Hunter requested a debrief on December 3, 2025.

EXHIBIT H

7. The Procurement Integrity Analysis and the Public Record

I know we were already able to fully respond to your public records request from last December, and I am confident that our public records team will continue to be responsive. *Public trust in our procurement process matters.* We will update our Commerce website next week to include both the complete proposal applications and the review panel members.

Our [Contractor's website](#) is frequently updated with information about the research team and how to get involved, including upcoming community information meetings. The Commission on African American Affairs posts its public meetings and agendas on [their site](#). Updates on this project are shared there, and meetings always include opportunity for public comment.

Thank you again for your questions and the opportunity to improve public confidence in Commerce.

Sincerely,

Sarah Clifthorne | INTERIM DIRECTOR
Washington State Department of Commerce
Cell: 360.789.1275

My work hours may not look like yours, but there's no expectation for you to read or respond outside of your regular schedule. Email communications with state employees are public records and may be subject to disclosure, pursuant to Ch. 42.56 RCW.

Executive Team

[Sarah Clifthorne](#) – Interim Director, Washington State Department of Commerce

Sarah provides strategic leadership across the agency, working closely with the agency's executive team to align agency operations and ensure Commerce delivers results for communities across Washington. Her career reflects a commitment to collaborative leadership, strong public institutions, and to fostering healthy workplaces where people feel respected, engaged, and valued in the work to create effective public policy. Sarah's prior work includes serving as the Washington State Senate Democratic Caucus Policy Director, leading a team of senior policy advisors to advance legislative strategies and foster partnerships on meaningful initiatives.

She holds a Master of Science in earth sciences from University of California Santa Cruz, a Bachelor of Arts in geology from Smith College, and a Certificate in Strategy Execution for Public Leadership from Harvard Business School Online. Beyond her professional endeavors, she's deeply committed to community service, having served on boards of non-profits focused on language access and addressing domestic violence and sexual assault, and volunteering with her children's public schools. Sarah lives in Olympia with her family.