



May 14, 2018

Christina L. Corl  
[ccorl@plunkettcooney.com](mailto:ccorl@plunkettcooney.com)  
(614) 629-3018

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission  
*Via Portal Submission Only*

**RE: Chyna Mitchell v. Columbus Urban League**  
**EEOC Charge no. 532-2017-01356**

To Whom it May Concern:

Please be advised that this office represents the Respondent in the above case, the Columbus Urban League (hereinafter "CUL"). Please accept this correspondence and attachments as CUL's narrative response to Mitchell's charge of discrimination alleging gender discrimination and retaliation.

By way of background, CUL stands as Central Ohio's oldest and most successful family and minority advocacy group. Fighting for equity and justice for nearly a century, CUL has instituted best practice initiatives focused on economic transformation, foundational education and family stabilization to touch and transform the lives of more than 7,000 people a year. Under the leadership of its first female CEO and president, Ms. Stephanie Hightower, the Columbus Urban League is now ranked among the top 5% of all 88 urban league affiliates across the country. CUL's mission is to provide services to minority and underrepresented communities.

Chyna Mitchell was first hired in late 2014. At the time of her termination on August 18, 2017, she was employed as an Associate Vice President for Strategic Projects & Investor Relations. Her job description defines the AVP position as assisting with the confidential duties of the President and CEO including "high-level special events planning and execution, handling Board meetings and minutes, fundraising, facilities, building operations and community relations." (See Job Description, Exhibit A).

Unbeknownst to the administration at CUL, Ms. Mitchell began an intimate relationship with another CUL employee, Joselyn Parker, within approximately one month of Ms. Parker's hire, in February 2017. Even though other employees of CUL were aware of - and made uncomfortable by - the relationship, in part, because of overt displays of affection between the two in the workplace, the relationship was not reported to CUL administration until May 1, 2017. The relationship was problematic because Ms. Mitchell *was involved in decisions that directly affected the employment of Ms. Parker*. CUL has a workplace policy entitled "Relationships in the Workplace" which forbids employees who are dating one another (among other relationships such as blood relatives) from

ATTORNEYS & COUNSELORS AT LAW

300 E. Broad Street, Suite 590 • Columbus, OH 43215 • T: (614) 629-3000 • F: (614) 629-3019 • [plunkettcooney.com](http://plunkettcooney.com)

● ●

PLUNKETT  COONEY

*Mitchell Resp. to EEOC Charge*  
*May 14, 2018*  
*Page 2*

---

“occupy[ing] positions of any level in the same line of authority that may affect the review of employment decisions” regarding the employees involved in the personal relationship. The policy goes on to state that any dating relationship that arises after employment must be “disclosed” to management so that decisions may be made to avoid a “potential conflict of interest.” (See Policy, Exhibit B).

After learning about the relationship, on May 9, 2017, Ms. Parker and Ms. Mitchell met with CUL Human Resources and with CUL’s attorney (the undersigned) to go over the applicable policy and set ground rules going forward for interaction in the workplace. Ms. Parker and Ms. Mitchell were informed that their relationship was not prohibited, but they would not be allowed to be involved in decisions/meetings regarding one another’s employment and would not be allowed to have personal contact at work because there was no legitimate business reason for them to be spending time together at work. Parker and Mitchell were told in no uncertain terms that they should not be spending time together at work, should not be in closed-door meetings with one another and should not be displaying physical affection toward one another in the workplace. Both indicated understanding of the policy going forward. Neither was disciplined for failing to disclose the existence of the relationship, even though the failure to report was a clear violation of CUL policy.

Unfortunately, instead of complying with CUL policy, Ms. Parker and Ms. Mitchell set out to defiantly violate it whenever they thought they could get away with it. Several CUL employees reported that Parker and Mitchell, thereafter, engaged in physical displays of affection in the workplace, held closed-door meetings in Ms. Mitchell’s office and “the two could have used better discretion when it came to their personal dealings with one another” including “speaking of personal feelings for one another, in common areas, amongst staff.” (Statement of Alicia Wilkes). As noted by one employee:

I must point out that these past few months have been an extremely uncomfortable working atmosphere, since Chyna and Joselyn have been involved in a personal relationship. I thought that this would change once President Hightower was notified of this relationship, *however it seemingly began to get worse. . . .* I can comfortab[ly] say that most times that President Hightower is out of the office Joselyn Parker will come and visit Chyna Mitchell.

(Statement of Michele Orr).

When CUL administration learned of the continued policy violations, Ms. Parker’s employment was terminated and Ms. Mitchell was given a 3-day, unpaid suspension. At the



*Mitchell Resp. to EEOC Charge*  
*May 14, 2018*  
Page 3

end of the suspension, Ms. Mitchell requested to be placed on FMLA leave and was on leave until late July, 2017.

While Ms. Mitchell was on FMLA leave, and even after her return, a myriad of performance issues and policy violations were discovered. Some of those issues are as follows:

1. Despite Ms. Mitchell being in charge of grant applications for CUL – which is a significant source of funding for CUL – it was discovered that Ms. Mitchell had not followed up on or submitted grant applications for grants from Fifth Third Bank, NiSource and AT & T. This is despite being made aware of grant submission deadlines and informing her supervisors that grant applications were being submitted timely. This jeopardized over \$50,000 in grant funding.
2. Ms. Mitchell violated CUL policy by forwarding confidential donor information to her personal email address. She also violated a directive from President Hightower to copy President Hightower on all communications with the CUL Board of Directors. Last, she requested to leave work early because she claimed she “had no work to do.”
3. The final straw involved a project assigned to Ms. Mitchell with The Hodge Group. The Hodge Group was retained to conduct an evaluation and analysis of CUL donor giving for purposes of constructing a sustainable funding and donor relations plan. A very important aspect of this analysis was for The Hodge Group to examine historical donor documents. The search for these documents went on for months, because Ms. Mitchell claimed that she could not locate the documentation to provide to Hodge. On August 10, 2017, another CUL employee located all of the allegedly “missing” documents in the drawer of the desk Ms. Mitchell had been utilizing until she returned from her FMLA leave.

As a result of these issues, Ms. Mitchell’s employment was terminated on August 18, 2017.

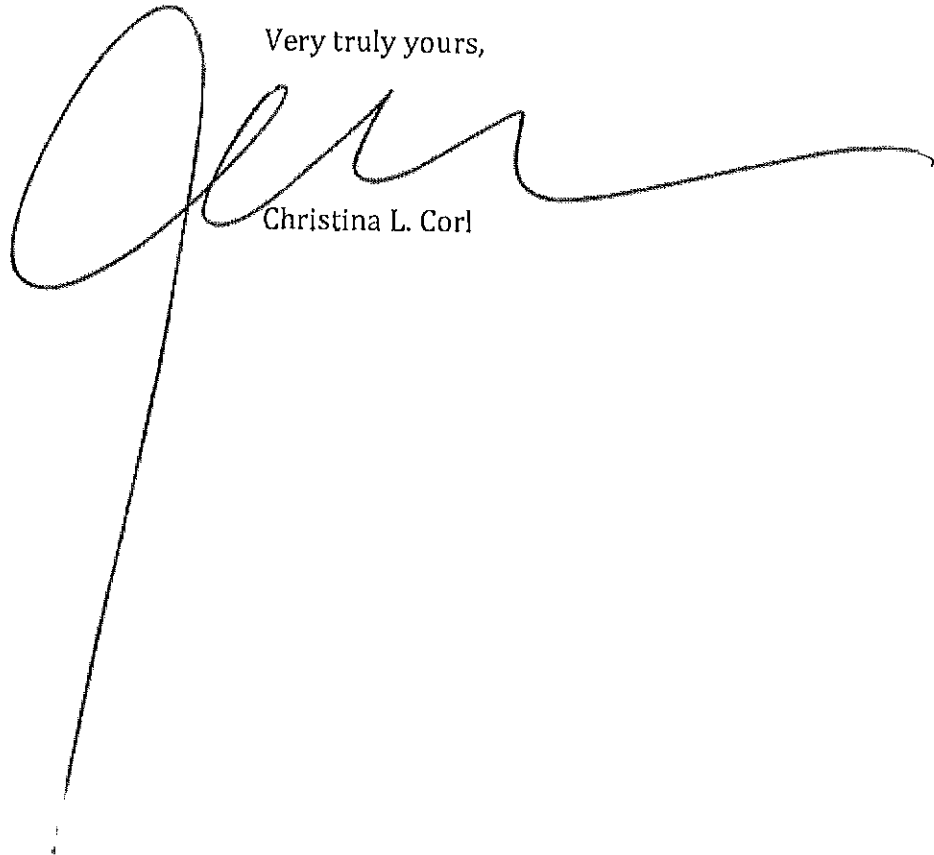
We trust this correspondence and the attached documentation adequately addresses Mitchell’s charge. CUL denies engaging in any discrimination or retaliation with respect to Ms. Mitchell.

PLUNKETT  COONEY

*Mitchell Resp. to EEOC Charge*  
*May 14, 2018*  
*Page 4*

Thank you for your kind attention and please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any additional questions or concerns.

Very truly yours,



Christina L. Corl