

March 27, 2012

Hon. Dennis M. Walcott
Chancellor
New York City Public Schools
Department of Education
52 Chambers Street, Room 314
New York, NY 10007

Re: Angel Namnum
Rosa Castillo (Namnum)
SCI Case #2011-5762

Dear Chancellor Walcott:

An investigation conducted by this office has substantiated that Executive Director Angel Namnum, assigned to the Division of Finance at the Department of Education (“DOE”), devised a scheme to arrange for his wife, Rosa Castillo, to be hired at the DOE Extended Use Office in the Bronx.¹

This investigation began in December 2011, when the Office of the Special Commissioner of Investigation (“SCI”) processed information from an anonymous source who lodged a complaint against Namnum and Castillo.

In an interview with investigators from this office, Angel Namnum said that he had been employed by the DOE for 26 years and currently worked at the DOE headquarters in the Tweed Building (“Tweed”), at an annual salary of approximately \$190,000. Namnum asserted that he did not personally hire his wife and was not involved in the process by which she was hired at the DOE. Namnum said that he and his wife married before he became employed by the DOE.

Namnum added that his wife worked for the DOE as a paraprofessional, under her maiden name, Rosa Castillo, from approximately 1990 through 1996, and resigned to raise her children. Namnum said that the DOE rehired Castillo in May 2011, in the clerical position of community coordinator in the Bronx. According to Namnum,

¹ Namnum and Castillo were not reassigned as a result of this investigation.

Castillo's salary was approximately \$52,000 a year. Namnum maintained that he held his current position when his wife was hired. Namnum claimed that he was not personally involved in Castillo being hired by the DOE and that she applied online. Namnum asserted that he was not responsible for supervising Castillo's DOE position.

SCI investigators met with DOE Senior Grants Officer Maite Villanueva, Castillo's immediate supervisor. Villanueva said that Castillo, who was assigned to the Extended Use Office in the Bronx, became employed by the DOE in May 2011, and worked on the applications for and authorization of extended use permits. Villanueva added that she never requested additional manpower and there was no posting for a vacancy in her office when Castillo was hired.

Villanueva informed investigators that Namnum worked at the Bronx office before he moved to Tweed and occasionally came by on Fridays. Villanueva added that, around March or April 2011, just before the imposed hiring freeze, she had a face-to-face conversation with Namnum who informed her that "there was going to be a position created for someone politically connected – coming from Veronica Conforme."² Villanueva explained that, a few weeks later, she received a telephone call from Namnum who directed her to call Rosa Castillo and request that she forward her résumé to Villanueva by e-mail. According to Villanueva, on another occasion before Castillo was hired, she had a face-to-face conversation with Namnum who asked whether Villanueva would be uncomfortable working with someone from his family.

Villanueva said that Namnum hired her in May 2008, when he worked in the Bronx office at One Fordham Plaza, and was her supervisor until December 2010, when Namnum transferred to Tweed. According to Villanueva, even though Namnum worked at Tweed, he still supervised the Extended Use Office and the Senior Grants Office until being replaced by Sandy Brawer, in March 2011. Villanueva added that, technically, Namnum supervised the Extended Use Office in the Bronx when the discussions about Castillo's employment began.

Villanueva requested and received Castillo's résumé by e-mail on May 2, 2011, and, on May 5, 2011, Castillo received an offer of employment in an e-mail message from Adriane Esquilin at DOE Human Resources.³ Thereafter, Villanueva arranged an assessment of Castillo's skills and experience and discovered that Castillo was not qualified for the position for which she was hired. Villanueva explained that Castillo barely spoke English, although command of the English language was required for her position because she dealt with school personnel and issued permits. Villanueva said that Castillo had no computer skills and the office was at a disadvantage while Castillo was being taught basic computer skills. Villanueva added that Castillo did not understand e-mail and was unable to respond to internal or external messages.

² At the time, Conforme was the Chief Financial Officer at the DOE.

³ Copies of Villanueva's e-mail requesting the résumé, Castillo's response, Castillo's résumé, Esquilin's e-mail message with the employment offer, and Castillo's responses were provided to SCI.

Villanueva told investigators that she was surprised to learn that Castillo was hired as a community coordinator, at an annual salary of approximately \$50,000, when the normal entry position of clerical associate or research associate paid approximately \$35,000 a year. Villanueva reiterated that there was no job posting for Castillo's position and added that there were employees who had been laid off by the DOE who likely would have applied for a vacancy.

Villanueva continued that, in December 2011, she received a call from Senior Grants Officer Sylvia Jamison, assigned to Tweed, who reported that someone from Villanueva's office had to be transferred to the Queens office where there was a personnel shortage. Villanueva notified her supervisor, Brawer, and told him that the policy was last in first out, meaning that Castillo would be transferred. Villanueva said that no one was transferred from the Bronx office.

Villanueva noted that Castillo's previous employment was with the Ramapo School District where she earned approximately \$20,000 a year, and used the name Rosa Namnum. Villanueva said that it normally took about six to eight weeks to be approved for a DOE parking permit, but Castillo had one on her first day of employment with the DOE.

SCI investigators spoke with DOE Senior Grants Officer Jamison, at Tweed; she was assigned to oversee the Grant Offices and Extended Use Offices for the DOE, under the supervision of Brawer. Jamison said that Brawer advised her that the Bronx office was overstaffed and the Queens office was understaffed. Brawer gave Jamison permission to transfer one employee from the Bronx Extended Use Office to Queens. Jamison added that she contacted Villanueva who responded that Namnum's wife was the last employee assigned to the unit. Jamison reported the situation to Brawer who was upset that Namnum's wife was hired "under his nose" without his knowledge. Jamison informed investigators that no one was transferred because the transfer was stopped and Brawer authorized the Queens Office to use per session funds to make up for the staff shortage. According to Jamison, if Namnum's wife had been transferred, there would have been no need to pay per session hours.

Jamison said that it was very unusual for an employee who issued permits to start in the position of community coordinator which paid \$20,000 to \$30,000 more than the usual clerical worker hired for the Extended Use Office. Jamison added that Human Resources should have created a posting for the position held by Namnum's wife. According to Jamison, the person hired for that position should speak English fluently, possess computer skills, and be able to multi-task.

SCI investigators met with DOE Executive Director of Business Services Sandy Brawer, at Tweed. Brawer asserted that Namnum's wife was hired under Namnum's

authority, not Brawer's authority. Brawer said that he knew nothing about the hiring until hearing about it from Jamison when the transfer issue occurred in December 2011. Brawer added that he was surprised to learn that Namnum's wife worked in the Extended Use Office issuing permits. Brawer explained that before he took over Namnum's position, Namnum was responsible for personnel in the Bronx Extended Use Office. Brawer reiterated that he had nothing to do with the hiring of Namnum's wife.

SCI investigators met with DOE Chief Operating Officer Veronica Conforme who said that she was Namnum's supervisor before she was promoted to her present position, in October 2011. Conforme added that she never met Namnum's wife and had nothing to do with her employment at the DOE. Specifically asked whether Namnum's wife was a political hire, Conforme reiterated that she had no knowledge of and nothing to do with Namnum's wife being hired by the DOE. At the assigned investigator's request, Conforme obtained the date when Namnum was hired at the Division of Finance: it was on April 29, 2011.

At Tweed, SCI investigators spoke with DOE Senior Director of Operations and Administration Omar Pereyra who was assigned to oversee the DOE budget, including the budget at the Extended Use Office in the Bronx. Pereyra said that, on April 1, 2011, he began the transition to take over Namnum's responsibilities. Pereyra recalled that, sometime after April 1, 2011, he had a telephone conversation with Namnum who asked Pereyra to do him a favor and staff Castillo into a certain vacancy. Pereyra explained that Namnum was his mentor, he had just started this new position, and he complied with Namnum's request. Namnum directed Pereyra to put Castillo into the DOE system with a certain job title and pay scale; Pereyra did not know who created the line for the position. According to Pereyra, he had no idea that the applicant was Namnum's wife.

Pereyra confirmed that Castillo's position was never posted. Pereyra added that Castillo's position should have been a clerical title and he thought she received a high pay scale for the position. Pereyra said that he never met Castillo and never vetted Castillo before she was hired. Pereyra confirmed that, to perform the position, Castillo should be able to communicate in English and should possess some basic computer skills. As Pereyra filled the position, he checked Castillo's fingerprints, and discovered that she was a former DOE employee. Pereyra learned that that Castillo was terminated from the DOE, on September 3, 2002, for failure to return to work from leave.

SCI investigators spoke with DOE Director of Teacher Development Adriane Esquilin who had been in that position since November 2011; before that, she was assigned to Human Resources in the Office of School Support and was responsible for staffing transactions. In that position, she worked for Namnum. According to Esquilin, around May 2011, Namnum gave her a résumé and said that "this person is going to be hired for a vacancy in the Bronx, contact them, and set up the applicant for processing."

Esquilin explained that, at the time, she did not know the applicant was Namnum's wife because the last name was different. Esquilin added that Namnum never informed her that the applicant was his wife. Esquilin confirmed that Castillo's position was not posted and no application was submitted. Esquilin said that she never met Castillo and never vetted Castillo before she was hired.⁴

Information from Chief Executive Officer of Human Resources Lawrence Becker revealed that, on February 16, 2011, Tracy Belgrave created the budgeted job for Rosa Castillo, effective on May 23, 2011.

SCI investigators met with DOE Senior Director of Operations and Administration Tracy Belgrave, at Tweed. Belgrave said that her previous position was in the Office of School Support where she worked for Namnum. Belgrave asserted that Namnum was her mentor and the investigation made her feel uncomfortable. Belgrave said that, sometime toward the beginning of 2011, either Namnum or Esquilin asked her to create a line for a community coordinator position in the Bronx. Belgrave added that Namnum was responsible for the budget and Esquilin was responsible for Human Resources. Belgrave reported that, at the time, Esquilin worked for Namnum, so the request for the job vacancy had to come from Namnum. According to Belgrave, she never met Castillo and never vetted Castillo before she was hired.

SCI investigators spoke with DOE Executive Director of Financial Operations George Vasilliou who explained that, at the time when Castillo's position was created and approved, he was the Deputy Chief Operating Officer. Vasilliou said that he approved the hiring of thousands of applicants and did not recall Castillo. Vasilliou added that a vacancy should have been submitted to him and he would have given the position an objective review. Vasilliou continued that, if the vacancy was approved and a candidate was selected, then he would authorize the hire. Vasilliou reported that Castillo's vacancy was created on February 16, 2011, and he authorized the hire on May 4, 2011. According to Vasilliou, although he knew Namnum, he had no idea that he had approved a position with the DOE for Namnum's wife. Vasilliou asserted that he did not have any discussions with Namnum about this matter.

SCI investigators spoke with DOE Administrator of Civil Service and Administration Joseph LoSchiavo who said that the position number under which Castillo was hired was a school-based position and required a college degree. LoSchiavo provided a copy of Castillo's application. Although her résumé showed an "A.A. – In Education" from Hostos Community College, her application indicated that Castillo attended that institution from 1985 to 1986, and did not graduate. The application also indicated that Castillo attended Boricua College from 1993 to 1994, but did not graduate.

⁴ Esquilin provided copies of an e-mail exchange she had with Castillo about the hiring process.

LoSchiavo added that the extended use clerical position which Castillo performed did not fall under the position number used to hire her. LoSchiavo said that the employment offer letter to Castillo gave an annual salary of \$52,322 as a community coordinator, but the position Castillo actually performed for the Extended Use Office called for a lower salary.

SCI investigators interviewed Rosa Castillo and a Spanish speaking investigator accompanied them to translate some of the questions and answers because Castillo did not understand the English speaking investigators. Castillo gave her name as Rosa Namnum. Castillo asserted that she used her maiden name to apply for a position with the DOE because she was thinking about going back to her maiden name. Castillo confirmed that the Ramapo School District employed her using the name Namnum. Castillo said that she had worked in community service with the Suffern school system where she was paid approximately \$32,000 a year. Castillo claimed that her current position was her first job with the DOE. After additional questions about that statement – one question was asked three times – Castillo recalled being employed by the DOE 20 years ago as a paraprofessional. Castillo maintained that she left the DOE after four years for a family-related issue.

Castillo said that she was hired for her current position with the DOE on March 12 or 13, 2011. Castillo claimed that, with help from her daughter, she applied through the DOE career opportunity link on the Career Builder website. Castillo asserted that she filled out an application online for a community service opportunity, not a particular position, and later followed up with her résumé.

According to Castillo, in February 2011, she responded to 65 Court Street to drop off paperwork for a position with the DOE. Castillo said that Villanueva called her about a position and, approximately two weeks later, she received the job at the Extended Use Office, at One Fordham Plaza, in the Bronx. Castillo claimed that her husband, Angel Namnum, did not assist her in any part of the hiring process and she was not aware that Villanueva worked for her husband. Castillo could not name Villanueva's supervisor at the time when she was hired, but was referring to Brawer. Castillo acknowledged that she could not work for her husband. Castillo said that Namnum worked downtown. According to Castillo, Namnum did not get her the job in the Extended Use Office and she had no idea how she ended up there. Castillo maintained that Villanueva did not know her husband and that no one in the office knew she was Namnum's wife. Castillo claimed that she never gave Namnum her résumé and did not know that he had passed it on to anyone within the DOE.

Castillo admitted that Namnum gave her a DOE parking permit when she started working because parking was very difficult around her building. Castillo said that she did not know Esquilin or Conforme. Castillo asserted that she understood English, but most of the business she attended to in the office was conducted in Spanish. Castillo

claimed that she had basic computer skills, but was receiving additional computer training at Villanueva's directive.

In a second interview with investigators from this office, Angel Namnum reiterated that he had nothing to do with his wife being hired for a position within the Extended Use Office. Namnum asserted that his wife filled a vacancy in the Bronx because the Bronx location covered the highest number of schools. Namnum denied speaking with Villanueva about a political hire, denied questioning her about working with a member of his family, and denied asking Villanueva to contact Castillo for her résumé.

Namnum believed that his wife was qualified for the community coordinator position. Namnum said that Castillo had a harsh accent, but understood English. Namnum maintained that stance even after being told that the investigators needed a translator to interview Castillo. Namnum added that Castillo had the basic computer skills needed for the position she held. Namnum reported that he had two DOE parking permits and admitted giving one to Castillo on her first day of work so she could park her car.

Namnum claimed to have no idea about the position number used to hire Castillo. Namnum acknowledged that he had filled numerous vacancies, but repeated that he had nothing to do with the hiring of his wife. Namnum said that Castillo had some college credits, but did not have a degree; he claimed not to know that one was required for the position she held. Namnum had no comment when advised that Brawer had reported that he had nothing to do with Castillo's hiring.

Namnum maintained that he did not take part in a telephone conversation as described by Pereyra and did not direct Pereyra to staff Castillo into a certain position, job title, and pay scale. Namnum reiterated that he had nothing to do with his wife being hired. Namnum claimed that he did not mention Conforme's name as the source of a political hire, did not give Esquilin Castillo's résumé, and did not say "this person is going to be hired for the vacancy in the Bronx." Namnum added that he did not direct Esquilin to contact Castillo and set up an interview. Namnum asserted that it was a normal process for Belgrave to create a line "budgeted job" for a community coordinator position. Namnum had no comment when informed that the line Belgrave created on February 16, 2011, while Namnum was still the supervisor of the Bronx Grants Office and Extended Use Office, was created for his wife, Castillo.

This is not the first time that Angel Namnum used his position to help a relative who was seeking a position with the DOE. In 2008, Namnum admitted that, when he was the Deputy Director of Budget in Region 2, he gave his brother's name to the Deputy Director of Regional Operations for DOE Region 2, to relay it to the Local Instructional

Superintendent for Region 2, in order for his brother to be interviewed for a principal vacancy.⁵ As a penalty, Namnum paid a \$1,250 fine.

Rosa Castillo's explanation of the process by which she was hired at the DOE and Angel Namnum's denials of being involved in the hiring of his wife are contradicted by the evidence provided by the other witnesses. We credit those witnesses.

It is the recommendation of this office that Angel Namnum's employment be terminated, that he be made ineligible for work with the DOE, and that this report be taken into consideration should he apply for another position in the New York City school system, in one of its facilities, or with one of its vendors, in the future.

It is the recommendation of this office that Rosa Castillo's employment be terminated, that she be made ineligible for work with the DOE, and that this report be taken into consideration should she apply for another position in the New York City school system, in one of its facilities, or with one of its vendors, in the future.

We note that the conduct described here may violate the conflicts of interest provisions of the New York City Charter which is administered by the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board.

We are forwarding a copy of this letter and of our report concerning this investigation to the Office of Legal Services. Should you have any inquiries regarding the above, please contact First Deputy Commissioner Regina Loughran, the attorney assigned to the case. She can be reached at (212) 510-1426. Please notify First Deputy Commissioner Loughran within 30 days of receipt of this letter of what, if any, action has been taken or is contemplated regarding Angel Namnum and Rosa Castillo. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

RICHARD J. CONDON
Special Commissioner
of Investigation for the
New York City School District

By: _____

Regina A. Loughran
First Deputy Commissioner

RJC:RAL:gm

c: Michael Best, Esq., Theresa Europe, Esq.

⁵ Along with other candidates, Namnum's brother was interviewed and he was hired for the principal position. The three-way settlement by Namnum, the DOE, and the New York City Conflicts of Interest Board, was publicly reported on February 28, 2008.