



MINUTES

**Claims Panel Meeting
of the Board of Trustees of the
State Universities Retirement System
Thursday, April 4, 2024, 8:30 am.
State Universities Retirement System
Conference Room 1901 B
1901 Fox Dr., Champaign, IL
(Hearing Officer Gaumer and Hearing Officer Clifford)**

The meeting of the Claims Panel Committees of the Board of Trustees of the State Universities Retirement System (SURS) was held on Thursday, April 4, 2024, beginning at 8:30 a.m.

The following Claims Panel members were present: Mr. Daniel Gaumer, Hearing Officer; Ms. Carolyn Clifford, Hearing Officer; Ms. Suzanne Mayer, SURS Executive Director; and Mr. Richard Figueroa, SURS Board of Trustee member.

Others present: Ms. Bianca Green, General Counsel; Ms. Heather Kimmons, Associate General Counsel; Ms. Jennifer Bartell, Director of Benefits Processing; Ms. Denise Shelton, Medical MSR; Ms. Karen Nyi and Ms. Annette Ackerman, Executive Assistants; Ms. Christina Cassel, Computer Operations; and Ms. Janet Cummings, Area Wide Reporting.

Claims Panel roll call attendance was taken. Hearing Officer Daniel Gaumer, present; Hearing Office Carolyn Clifford, present; Executive Director Suzanne Mayer, present; Trustee Richard Figueroa, present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Gaumer presented the open session minutes from the Claims Panel Hearing of February 12, 2024.

Ms. Mayer made the following motion:

That the open session minutes from the February 12, 2024, Claims Panel Hearing be approved as presented.

Trustee Figueroa seconded the motion which passed via the roll call vote referenced below:

Mr. Gaumer - aye
Ms. Mayer - aye
Trustee Figueroa - aye

Mr. Gaumer presented the closed minutes from his Claims Panel Hearing of February 12, 2024, for approval with the recommendation that they remain closed.

Ms. Mayer made the following motion:

That the closed session minutes from February 12, 2024, Claims Panel Hearing be approved as presented and remain closed.

Trustee Figueroa seconded the motion which passed via the roll call vote referenced below:

Mr. Gaumer - aye
Ms. Mayer - aye
Trustee Figueroa - aye

Ms. Clifford presented the open session minutes from her Claims Panel Hearing of February 12, 2024.

Ms. Mayer made the following motion:

That the open session minutes from the February 12, 2024, Claims Panel Hearing be approved as presented.

Trustee Figueroa seconded the motion which passed via the roll call vote referenced below:

Mr. Gaumer - aye
Ms. Mayer - aye
Trustee Figueroa - aye

Ms. Clifford presented the closed minutes from her Claims Panel Hearing of February 12, 2024, for approval with the recommendation that they remain closed.

Ms. Mayer made the following motion:

That the closed session minutes from February 12, 2024, Claims Panel Hearing be approved as presented and remain closed.

Trustee Figueroa seconded the motion which passed via the roll call vote referenced below:

Ms. Clifford - aye
Ms. Mayer - aye
Trustee Figueroa - aye

CONTINUATION OF CLAIM – NATHAN HOFF

The claim of Mr. Nathan Hoff was called for a hearing. Mr. Dan Gaumer served as the assigned Hearing Officer. Mr. Hoff was previously notified of the date and time for his assigned Claims Panel hearing. His matter had a firm start time because it was the only case scheduled to be heard on this date. Mr. Hoff did not join the meeting at the scheduled start time so Ms. Annette Ackerman called Mr. Hoff to confirm his participation. Mr. Hoff did not answer that call but Ms. Ackerman left a message. On April 3, 2024, SURS staff emailed Mr. Hoff again reminding him of the meeting the next morning but he did not respond to the email. SURS staff was represented by SURS General Counsel, Ms. Bianca Green.

Mr. Gaumer proceeded with the hearing as scheduled because SURS members are not required to participate in the review of their claims before the Claims Panel Committee. Mr. Gaumer noted that Mr. Hoff had filed a motion requesting to have Mr. Gaumer removed as the assigned Hearing Officer for his claim. Mr. Gaumer explained that during the weeks leading up to this meeting, Mr. Hoff repeatedly called Mr. Gaumer's office and his home, leaving threatening messages for Mr. Gaumer and his wife. As a result of Mr. Hoff's threatening behavior, Mr. Gaumer felt he could not be objective in his role as the Hearing Officer for this case and he voluntarily recused himself from serving as the assigned Hearing Officer.

Ms. Carolyn Clifford then took over the meeting and the hearing for Mr. Hoff's pending claim as the Hearing Officer assigned by SURS to handle this matter. Ms. Clifford reminded everyone that Claims Panel member/SURS Executive Director, Ms. Suzanne Mayer, had previously recused herself as a voting member of the Claims Panel for Mr. Hoff's case because she was previously involved in his claim and because she was directly involved in increasing security measures at SURS following the physical threats made by Mr. Hoff to SURS staff and to Mr. Gaumer. Ms. Clifford confirmed that she and Trustee Figueroa would hear the evidence in the case and make any decisions regarding the same.

Ms. Clifford confirmed that prior to Mr. Hoff's threatening behavior, 3,897 pages were previously admitted into the record by Hearing Officer Gaumer during the initial scheduled hearing for Mr. Hoff's claim on November 13, 2023. Ms. Clifford also noted that prior to the November 13, 2023, hearing, Mr. Hoff had submitted additional records to SURS via fax on November 11, 2023, and on November 13, 2023. In addition to the addition of those records, Ms. Bianca Green also presented additional documents that needed to be added to the record that were numbered as pages 4,224 – 4,274. Ms. Green asked Ms. Clifford to admit those additional documents into the record in this case. Hearing Officer Clifford admitted all the additional records presented by Mr. Hoff and by Ms. Green into the administrative record as pages numbered 3,898 through 4,274.

Ms. Green then provided a verbal summary of the issues to be addressed by the Claims Panel relating to Mr. Hoff's claim. The claimant, Mr. Nathan Hoff, still had not joined the meeting and as such, he was not present to provide any testimony in support of his claim and was likewise unavailable for SURS to be able to cross-examine him. Ms. Green then asked that SURS staff members Ms. Jennifer Bartell and Ms. Denise Shelton be sworn in by the court reporter prior to testifying about the facts of the claim.

At the conclusion of the testimony, Ms. Clifford addressed and reviewed the three motions previously submitted by Mr. Hoff. Those motions included a motion by the claimant requesting to cross examine individuals who had documented or prepared documents in the records. Another motion to have three members of the previous employer, Rock Valley College, produce records and testimony. This included Janet Taylor, head of the Rock Valley College plant operations, Jim Handley, vice president of Human Resources at Rock Valley College and Douglas Jenson, president of Rock Valley College. This also included a request to move the hearing to Rockford, Illinois. The last motion was to subpoena the State of Wisconsin of Vocational Rehabilitation, specifically Joel Wolfgram, a vocational specialist, along with an attorney for the State of Wisconsin, DWD. Ms. Clifford denied all pending motions and requests.

At the conclusion of the claim presentation, Hearing Officer Carolyn Clifford closed the evidentiary proofs.

CLAIMS PANEL DELIBERATIONS

Mr. Figueroa made a motion to move into closed session, pursuant to §2(c)(4) of the Illinois Open Meetings Act, to consider the evidence and testimony presented in open session in the case. Ms. Clifford seconded the motion which passed via the roll call vote referenced below:

Ms. Clifford	-	aye
Trustee Figueroa	-	aye

RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

Upon completion of the closed session deliberations, the Claims Panel returned to open session, at approximately 10:28 a.m.

Trustee Figueora then made the following motion pertaining to Mr. Hoff's pending claim:

To affirm the staff decision, finding that Nathan Hoff has not proven by preponderance of the evidence that he is entitled to the relief sought, and that a written decision of factual findings and conclusions be drafted by the Hearing Officer and signed by the members of the Claims Panel voting in favor of the motion.

Ms. Clifford seconded the motion, which passed via the following roll call vote:

Ms. Clifford	-	aye
Trustee Figueroa	-	aye

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

There was no further business before the Claims Panel and there was no public comment. Trustee Figuero moved that the meeting be adjourned. The motion was seconded by Ms. Clifford and passed via the following roll call vote:

Ms. Clifford	-	aye
Trustee Figueroa	-	aye

The meeting was adjourned at 10:31 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Carolyn Clifford
Hearing Officer

cc:aa