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Crime Commission Attacks Navarro

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The Broward County Crime Commission has criticized Sheriff Nick Navarro for firing or demoting 35 employees, calling the actions "political reprisals" that were "unprecedented and unjustified."

Commission president Maynard Abrams called on Navarro to reverse the orders, warning in a letter that many of the firings may have been illegal and violations of employees' civil rights.

"Although you stated in the campaign that there would be no political reprisals, many of these terminations appear to be just that," Abrams wrote.

Neither Navarro nor Abrams could be reached for comment late Friday.

Irving Superfine, the commission's first vice president, said the board of directors drafted the letter after meeting with several employees affected by Navarro's actions.

Superfine declined further comment. "I think the letter speaks for itself," he said.

Specifically, the commission's letter said employees may have been denied their right to due process because Navarro did not give them written charges or public hearings, as required by state law.

Firings executed by Navarro before he was sworn in may be "legally unauthorized and therefore null and void," Abrams said.

In what Navarro called "cleaning house" just days before his swearing in, he fired the deputies and jail guards by not allowing them to take the oath they needed to retain their jobs.

He acknowledged that some of those were dismissed because they had worked in the campaign for former Sheriff George Brescher, who Navarro defeated in November. Other firings or demotions were aimed at eliminating incompetence in the department, Navarro said.

The commission's letter, dated Jan. 21, seemed uncharacteristically harsh from an organization that primarily deals with crime prevention and other less politically controversial issues. It is a citizens' group composed of businessmen, law enforcement officials and politicians.

The commission requested a meeting with Navarro, but the sheriff has not yet responded, Superfine said.

Several of the dismissed employees have filed a formal grievance with the Federation of Public Employees. The firings also may have a broader implication for the community, the commission's letter suggests.

``The modus operandi for the mass firings, as well as other demotions and/or transfers, apparently without proper documented cause and prescribed procedure, is causing public embarrassment and personal hardship to the terminees and their families,`` the letter said.

``It is also depriving the Sheriff's Office and the people of Broward County of many dedicated professionals with about 300 years of law enforcement service.``

The letter included a copy of complaint review board procedures for deputy sheriffs issued by Brescher last year.