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Community Coalition Undercut By City Health Department

Statement of Alderman Tony Zielinski April 16, 2019

Something about how the city was awarded a five-year, \$5 million grant to combat infant mortality smells pretty awful, and the Milwaukee community deserves to know the truth.

Milwaukee Health Services Director and CEO Dr. Tito Izard M.D. said MHS (the second largest community health center in Milwaukee) and the Milwaukee African American Perinatal Health Collaborative had applied to run the Healthy Start program – designed to combat Milwaukee’s infant mortality problem that sees Black babies in the city being three times more likely than white babies to die before their first birthday – but were undermined by City Health Commissioner Jeanette Kowalik, who instead encouraged Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin to also apply for the grant.

In effect, Commissioner Kowalik chose to cut out the African American coalition and instead have the city be the grant seeker.

When Dr. Izard – someone who is widely respected in the community and who rarely speaks publicly about such matters – calls out Commissioner Kowalik on this grant process (crying foul), I am convinced that something improper might have occurred that deserves public scrutiny.

It seems without question that the Commissioner decided to undercut a coalition centered on the unique health needs of the African American community.

In that vein it only seems logical to ask this question of Mayor Barrett: Mr. Mayor, was your nominee (Commissioner Kowalik) acting with your permission in regard to the Healthy Start grant or without it?

I look forward to hearing your answer, Mr. Mayor.

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