

**STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
BEFORE THE RHODE ISLAND ETHICS COMMISSION**

**In re: Frank Brown, Jr.  
Respondent**

**Complaint No. 2023-4**

**ORDER**

This matter having been heard before the Rhode Island Ethics Commission on January 9, 2024, pursuant to 520-RICR-00-00-3.16 Informal Disposition (1011), and the Commission having considered the Complaint herein, the Respondent's Answer, the arguments of the parties, and the proposed Informal Resolution and Settlement, which is incorporated by reference herein, it is hereby

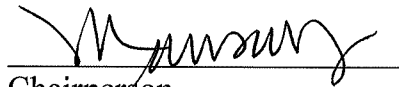
**ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED**

THAT:

1. The Commission approves the Informal Resolution and Settlement; and
2. The Commission incorporates by reference herein the Findings of Fact and Admissions, and the Conclusions of Law, set forth in the Informal Resolution and Settlement; and
3. By participating in the Nominating Committee's recommendation of his spouse, Denise Brown, for the position of Hopkins Hill Fire District Tax Collector each year during the period of 2017-2023, the Respondent violated 520-RICR-00-00-1.3.1 Prohibited Activities - Nepotism (36-14-5004); and
4. The Respondent shall resign from the Hopkins Hill Fire District Nominating Committee and not seek or accept any further appointment thereto; and
5. The Investigative Report filed by the Commission Prosecutor in the instant matter will be made public along with the Informal Resolution and Settlement; and
6. The Respondent is ordered to pay a civil penalty in the amount of Two Thousand Five Hundred Dollars (\$2,500); and

7. The remaining allegations set forth in the instant Complaint are hereby dismissed with prejudice.

ENTERED as an Order of this Commission,

  
Chairperson

Dated: 1/9/2024

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In re: Frank Brown, Jr.  
Respondent

Complaint No. 2023-4

**INFORMAL RESOLUTION AND SETTLEMENT**

The Respondent, Frank Brown, Jr., and the Ethics Commission Prosecutor, representing the People of the State of Rhode Island, hereby agree to a resolution of the above-referenced matter as follows, subject to the approval of the Rhode Island Ethics Commission (“Ethics Commission”):

**I. FINDINGS OF FACT & ADMISSIONS**

1. The Respondent has served as the Fire Chief of the Hopkins Hill Fire District (“Fire District” or “District”) in Coventry, Rhode Island, since 1993.

2. The Fire District is governed by a seven-member Executive Committee (“Board of Directors” or “District Board”) who are elected to one-year terms of office annually by the District electors. All District Board positions are remunerated, with the position of Tax Collector being paid an annual amount of \$17,500.

3. Denise Brown, the Respondent’s spouse, was first elected to the Fire District’s Board of Directors in 2001. She has continuously served on the District Board in the position of Tax Collector since 2001.

4. At all relevant times, the Respondent has also served on the Fire District’s Nominating Committee. Nominating Committee members are appointed by the District

Board each June and receive no remuneration for their service. The Nominating Committee's duty is to nominate one District elector for each District officer position.

5. In August of each year from 2017-2023, the Respondent participated in the Nominating Committee's recommendation of nominees for each District officer position, including the Tax Collector position held by his spouse. The 2017-2023 Nominating Committee reports submitted to the District Board listed Denise Brown as the sole nominee for Tax Collector.

6. In August of each year from 2017-2023, the District board unanimously (7-0) voted to accept the Nominating Committee's Report and present the nominees to the District electors at the annual meeting in September.

7. As the only nominee for Tax Collector appearing on the ballot at the 2017-2023 annual meetings, Denise Brown was elected to said position annually.

## **II. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW**

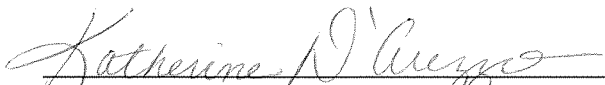
1. At all relevant times, the Respondent was municipal appointed official subject to the Rhode Island Code of Ethics in Government pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-4(2).

2. By participating in the Nominating Committee's recommendation of his spouse, Denise Brown, for the position of Hopkins Hill Fire District Tax Collector each year during the period of 2017-2023, the Respondent violated 520-RICR-00-00-1.3.1 Prohibited Activities - Nepotism (36-14-5004).


**III. SETTLEMENT**

Pursuant to the above Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law, the parties hereby agree, subject to the approval of the Commission, pursuant to R.I. Gen. Laws § 36-14-13(d) and 520-RICR-00-00-3.16 Informal Disposition (1011), to the following:

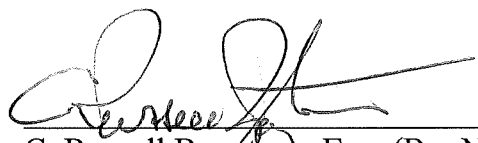
1. The Commission shall enter an Order and Judgment adopting the Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and terms of the Settlement herein.
2. The Respondent agrees that he will resign from the District Nominating Committee and that he will not seek or accept any further appointment thereto.
3. The Respondent agrees that the Prosecution will recommend the imposition of a civil penalty in the amount of \$2,500. The Respondent agrees to the payment of said civil penalty.
4. The Respondent further agrees that the Investigative Report filed by the Commission Prosecutor in the instant matter will be made public along with the Informal Resolution and Settlement.
5. The above terms represent the full and complete Informal Resolution and Settlement for Complaint No. 2023-4 and the remaining allegations set forth therein shall be dismissed.

  
Katherine D'Arezzo, Esq. (Bar No. 5710)  
Commission Prosecutor

Dated: 1/9/2024

  
Frank Brown, Jr.  
Respondent

Dated: 1/9/2024



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C. Russell Bengtson, Esq. (Bar No.1233)  
Respondent's Counsel

Dated: