

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

ECONOMY AND EFFICIENCY COMMISSION

ROOM 163, HALL OF ADMINISTRATION / 500 WEST TEMPLE / LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012 / 974-1491

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February 10, 1976

Honorable Board of Supervisors
Los Angeles County
383, Hall of Administration
Los Angeles, Calif. 90012

Gentlemen:

SUBJECT: PROPOSED CHARTER AMENDMENT TO REMOVE DEPARTMENT
HEADS AND CHIEF DEPUTIES FROM CIVIL SERVICE STATUS

Among the Charter amendments which the Board of Supervisors is scheduled to discuss on February 19 is the proposal by Supervisor Schabarum to remove department heads and chief deputies from Civil Service status. The objective of this proposal is to make these officials accountable to the Board of Supervisors for their performance and to enable the Board to discipline or remove them if their performance does not measure up to acceptable standards.

We agree with this objective. As we have stated in previous reports, the present Civil Service system is overly rigid and overly protective. Rather than promote merit, it tends to protect mediocrity. Under the present system it is virtually impossible to discharge a department head except for gross incompetence, malfeasance, or immorality.

Civil Service systems were developed to protect public employment against spoils and other forms of injustice resulting from improper political pressure. Unfortunately, in the zeal to protect employees from such injustices, these systems have tended to become as much anti-management as anti-spoils.

For these reasons, in our 1970 report proposing a major reorganization of County government, we recommended that department heads and chief deputies be removed from the classified service. At the same time, however, we prescribed safeguards designed to insure that County officials would be selected on the basis of merit and would be disciplined or removed only for proper cause.

We recommended, therefore, that the selection process require open, competitive examinations supervised and administered by the Civil Service Commission. We also recommended that, if dismissed, County executives would have the right to meet with the Board of Supervisors in executive session, or in a public session if they requested it, to consider and discuss the reasons for their dismissal. In addition, the appointing authority would be required to prepare a written report setting forth the reasons for dismissal. This report would be made public.

We believe that unless these or similar procedures are incorporated in the amendment changing the status of department heads and chief deputies the County runs the risk of replacing the present system, which is too protective and inflexible, with one which provides no protection whatsoever. We do not share the view that there is no longer any need today for protection against spoils or other forms of political pressure.

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For these reasons, the commission, on January 28, voted unanimously to oppose any amendment which removes department heads and chief deputies from Civil Service status unless it also includes effective safeguards against political influence.

Very truly yours,

ROBERT J. DOWNEY

Chairman

RJD:ml