



Fabiola Colas &lt;colas@aps.org&gt;

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## Follow-Up & Continued Support

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**Fabiola Colas** <colas@aps.org>

Fri, Feb 14, 2025 at 2:07 PM

To: Meghan White &lt;white@aps.org&gt;

Cc: Johanna Aponte &lt;aponte@aps.org&gt;

Bcc: Beth Gunzel &lt;gunzel@aps.org&gt;, Gia Gatien &lt;gatien@aps.org&gt;

Hi Meghan,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and Johanna yesterday, Thursday, February 13, 2025. I genuinely appreciate you sharing your experiences and concerns, and I want to acknowledge how difficult these conversations can be. Our priority is to ensure that you have a safe and respectful working environment at APS. Please know that your well-being matters to us, and we are here to listen and support you in whatever way we can.

I want to begin by acknowledging how this conversation came about and why we scheduled our meeting. Your initial Slack message regarding the communication surrounding Karmin's departure highlighted an important concern about workplace culture, transparency, and how such oversights impact employees. When you expressed that this was not the way people should learn about a colleague's departure and shared your distress over the broader work culture, I wanted to reach out immediately to offer my support. I also greatly appreciate your willingness to have a conversation, even after sharing that you were already feeling overwhelmed and had reached out to EAP for assistance. From that moment, my focus was ensuring that you had a safe space to express yourself and that we could explore ways to support you.

During our meeting on Thursday, February 13, I started by asking how you were feeling and how things had been going. You shared that you had been feeling extremely stressed and had met with the benefits team about potentially taking FMLA due to stress. As we continued our discussion, you expressed that a significant contributor to your stress was your working relationship with your supervisor, Denise Herdemann. You mentioned that you felt her leadership had been a major stressor, leading you to seek EAP services not only early on but also recently. When I asked for more details, you recounted that when Denise first started, you had shared with her that you were experiencing a private health condition. . Since then, you have felt that she has made remarks which have made you uncomfortable

You hesitated to share examples but eventually referenced an instance where Denise spoke about her mother's health, stating, "I hope my mother gets better soon, or else I am going to have to put her on Prozac." You explained that this statement felt dismissive and made you uncomfortable, especially given that you had previously shared your own mental health condition with her. Over time, you noticed other remarks that you found to be inconsiderate, and you also felt that Denise may have been withholding projects from you based on what she knew about your mental health. You expressed that you had not shared these concerns directly with Denise because you did not feel comfortable doing so. However, you also shared that this situation had deeply affected you, leading you to seek EAP services again.

When you became emotional, I asked if you would be comfortable having another HR colleague join the call to ensure that you were fully supported. After some hesitation, you agreed, and I reached out to Johanna Aponte, Director of HR, who then joined us. Once she was present, I recapped our discussion, and you clarified that while you had mentioned FMLA, you were not directly attributing the need for leave to stress caused by Denise. You reiterated that Denise had previously stated during a project discussion that she would withhold some aspects of the work so that you "don't feel overwhelmed," which you interpreted as a direct reference to your mental health. You expressed that this remark felt dismissive and that it reinforced your concerns about how she perceived and treated you.

Johanna asked if you had shared any of these concerns with Denise and emphasized the importance of direct

communication, as sometimes individuals may not realize the impact of their words. She also reassured you that we, as HR professionals, are here to support you and that your well-being is a priority. At that moment, you expressed regret for joining the conversation and stated that you felt you had made a mistake by raising these concerns. Johanna reminded you that our role is to listen, support, and ensure a safe and respectful work environment. While you initially questioned whether you were being overly sensitive, you shared that you wanted to work with EAP to develop strategies for handling your working relationship with Denise. We fully supported your decision while also reiterating that, as HR, we have an obligation to address concerns raised to us.

Later in the day, when we reconvened at 4 PM, we reassured you that your concerns were being taken seriously, especially given their connection to your well-being. We emphasized APS's strict non-retaliation policy and our commitment to ensuring a respectful and professional workplace. To that end, we discussed facilitating a conversation between you and Denise so that we can create a constructive path forward. When asked if you needed additional support, you reiterated that you regretted the conversation and wished you hadn't said anything. You questioned whether you were overreacting and expressed a desire to process everything with your therapist before taking further action.

We acknowledged your feelings and reassured you that it is completely understandable to need time to reflect. At the same time, we emphasized that our role in HR is to act on concerns brought to us. We let you know that we would schedule a meeting with you and Denise in the upcoming week to discuss your concerns and that HR would take the lead in facilitating that discussion. You asked us to paraphrase how we would present the conversation to Denise, and we assured you that we would communicate your concerns with professionalism, respect, and a focus on resolution. Johanna also offered to address your concerns with Denise without your presence, and you declined that option. . We understand that this is a sensitive situation, and our goal is to ensure you feel supported throughout this process. While we do need to address your concerns with Denise, we will approach the conversation thoughtfully and with care, prioritizing constructive and respectful resolution.

Meghan, we are here to support you in any way we can. If there is anything else you need, please do not hesitate to reach out. I also want to ensure that you are aware you can reach out to HR to request work accommodations if you ever feel that is necessary. Please take the time you need to process, and know that we are available whenever you are ready.

Looking forward to our next steps together, and please don't hesitate to reach out at any time.

Best,

Fab



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