

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Montana Highway Patrol Withholds Survey & Terminates Decorated Trooper, Union President**

(Helena, MT) - On Friday, April 19th, the Montana Highway Patrol (MHP) terminated Alicia Bragg, a decorated trooper and union president. The termination is a retaliatory attempt to further obfuscate a recent workplace climate survey. MFPE, Bragg's statewide union, has filed both an Unfair Labor Practice complaint with the Board of Personnel Appeals and a grievance with MHP and the Department of Justice.

Early this year, MHP commissioned a workplace climate survey. Prior to receiving survey results, MHP formed a committee of management and labor to analyze feedback provided by troopers. Alicia Bragg, as union president, became a member of the committee according to the troopers' bargained contract which requires a labor presence on such committees. After troopers shared their honest perspectives and the survey was complete, agency management provided an executive summary of the results to committee members.

As union president, Bragg took the lead in making sure troopers' contractually guaranteed wages, benefits, and working conditions were being honored. After several weeks, the departure of Colonel Lavin, and no movement by management to further explore the survey or begin implementing needed changes, Bragg consulted with the staff supporting her troopers at the Montana Federation of Public Employees (MFPE). The critiques offered in the survey results clearly demonstrated that many troopers were not being supported by management and their working conditions were eroding. Troopers feared the report was being sanitized.

Union members' fear of retaliation within the department is real. Union staff, in concert with members and elected officers, perpetually enforce bargained agreements. These troubling survey results forced consideration of whether a demand to bargain over working conditions should be made.

In late March, the Daily Montanan published a story on the survey. A copy of the survey's summary was included. MHP quickly retaliated and placed Bragg on administrative leave after learning she had communicated about the survey with her union staff. In an investigatory hearing on April 11th, agency management—MHP Interim Colonel Kurt Sager and DOJ HR Director Melissa Gardner—failed to be impartial investigators.

“In my initial hearing, MHP leadership asked me who would have my back in a dark alley now,” **Alicia Bragg said.** “I realized their investigation was a witch hunt and they didn't care about using troopers' survey input to improve our working conditions. Yes, as union president, I

communicated about this survey—whether or not troopers’ truthful participation could be grounds for disciplinary actions—with my union staff. And I was fired for it.”

Following the hearing, Bragg was terminated. MFPE contends the termination violates MCA [39-31-201](#), establishing grounds for an unfair labor practice per MCA [39-31-401](#). As of the day she was terminated, Bragg remained the face of MHP on their website.

“MHP management is retaliating against a decorated trooper for doing her job as a union president. It is illegal to retaliate against a union president for sharing information related to her members’ working conditions with her union staff,” **said MFPE President Amanda Curtis.** “We’re working to address this excessive punishment, get Alicia’s job back, and tackle MHP’s rapidly deteriorating working conditions for all troopers.”

The unfair labor practice and grievance processes will investigate Bragg’s termination and management’s interference with union activity over the coming weeks and months. The grievance has been denied by the department, and MFPE will move the matter to arbitration. Bragg is hopeful MHP management will back their troopers and not engage in additional retaliatory witch hunts.

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