



CITY OF CLEVELAND

Office of the Council

www.clevelandcitycouncil.org

Blaine A. Griffin

PRESIDENT OF CITY COUNCIL

September 23, 2025

Council Colleagues,

I need to update you on a recent troubling situation.

On September 18, representatives from the Bibb administration accused City Council employee Steve Rys of downloading confidential files from GovQA, the City's public records request database, and gave us an ultimatum: fire Steve immediately or they will go public with their accusation. They also threatened to explore prosecuting Steve in Federal Court, even though they admitted such an action was likely to fail. Further, they accused Council of attempting to weaponize the information Steve accessed against the administration.

This came as a complete surprise.

After reviewing the Bibb Administration's accusation, I've concluded Steve has done nothing wrong.

I also believe this accusation has very little to do with Steve. It's an attempt to embarrass and undermine our ability to do our job by going after one of our employees.

They should be ashamed of themselves.

As all of you know, Steve is one of the people who helps us stay apprised of what the administration is doing. There are seventeen of us on our side of the hall, and we all depend on the information our staff provides. We all depend on Steve, and he's good at his job, which is why they don't like him.

By attacking Steve, they are attacking all of us and trying to divide us from each other.

Steve uses the public records request database to access information about city operations, so he can be prepared to answer our questions. This is often necessary because getting information out of the Bibb administration is so hard. We've all experienced this. Responses to public record requests are often incomplete or slowly compiled.

Yes, Steve has accessed the files and, at times, has downloaded them. It is part of his job. Steve has had access to the public records request database since it was first installed in 2017, and access implies permission to look at the items available to you. Every person with end-user access to GovQA may look at and download files as Steve has. Up until recently, there were no guardrails within the public records request database. The administration only provided GovQA training when first initiated in 2017, but has provided no training since then—at least not for Council or Council staff. None of the files Steve accessed were marked confidential, and the Bibb administration didn't segregate confidential files behind a firewall until May this year.

There is no evidence whatsoever that any downloaded files were leaked or used for anything other than his work for Council.

City Hall 601 Lakeside Avenue, N. E., Room 220, Cleveland, OH 44114

Email bgriffin@clevelandcitycouncil.org • **Office of the President** (216) 664-4579 • **Ward 6 Office** (216) 664-4234 • **Fax** (216) 664-3837

Blaming Steve for accessing files that were available to him is like giving someone a library card and accusing them of wrongdoing for looking at the books the librarians put on the shelves. It's unfair and baseless. It's a contrived attempt to distract attention from the Bibb administration's failure to sufficiently manage the public records request database. Far more people in the administration have access to it than those working for City Council. Why single out Steve when many members of the administration may have done the same thing?

The Bibb administration has repeatedly demonstrated its disdain for City Council and failed to treat us as a co-equal partner in governing the city. Using accusations against Steve to disparage Council is more of the same.

What I don't understand is, "Why the overkill?" Ending Steve's career and threatening federal prosecution are big hammers to use to pound down a relatively small nail. Do they want to undermine Council's ability to hold them accountable? Is there something in these files they don't want us to see? Or is it just par for the course for the Bibb administration's love of secrecy? I don't know.

I've sent you this summary to ensure you're prepared when the media eventually calls. I've also released it to the media. These attacks on City Council need to end. The best way to do that is by bringing them to light.

Sincerely,



Blaine A. Griffin
Council President
Cleveland City Council