

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION REPORT

I. Introduction

This report is the result of an investigation into allegations made by multiple employees of the Town of Rockland (“Town”) Health Department (“Department”) against Robert Stephens (“Mr. Stephens”), the Chair of the Board of Health.

II. Summary of Allegations and Scope of Investigation

On June 17, 2025, during a Rockland Board of Health (“Board of Health”) meeting at Town Hall, a Town resident engaged in a verbal confrontation with Mr. Stephens. The altercation was based on comments made by Mr. Stephens about a member of the Board of Health on the MMR Talks podcast in March of 2025. The verbal confrontation continued after the conclusion of the meeting, prompting involvement of the Rockland Police Department.

On June 18, 2025, an employee emailed a complaint to the Town’s HR Department citing more examples of alleged disruptive behavior by Mr. Stephens, including disparaging remarks made by Mr. Stephens about Town employees and elected officials during in-person visits to Town Hall, in e-mail communications, on a local podcast, and at Town meetings. A follow up email included an allegation that Mr. Stephens engaged in targeted harassment and retaliation towards an employee based on their age. The Town engaged this Investigator to determine whether Mr. Stephens or other Town officials violated Town policies, and if so, to make recommendations for corrective action.

III. Conclusions

Based on interview statements from multiple witnesses, a review of email files, Town Hall surveillance video, police reports, podcast recordings, Board of Health and Select Board recorded meetings and other related documentary evidence, I conclude the following:

There is sufficient credible evidence that Mr. Stephens violated the Standards of Conduct policy in the Town’s Boards, Committees and Commissions Handbook.

The Standards of Conduct policy states, in part:

Members of all boards, committees and commissions are expected to:

- * Treat all members of the board, all applicants who come before the board, all staff members, and the public with respect, despite differences of opinion.

- * Treat all staff as professionals, in a manner that respects the abilities, experience and dignity of each individual.
- * Conduct themselves in a manner that maintains public confidence in our local government.
- * Conduct official business in such a manner as to give the clear impression that they cannot be improperly influenced in the performance of their official duties.

Mr. Stephens violated the Town's Standards of Conduct policy on multiple occasions, beginning in 2024, by speaking in a disrespectful manner to Health Department staff and other Town Hall employees, engaging in disrespectful email communications about Health Department employees and elected officials, and making inappropriate remarks about Department employees, Board of Health members, and Board of Health matters on two (2) MMR Talks podcast episodes in March of 2025. Mr. Stephens acknowledged signing the Town's Boards, Committees and Commissions Handbook, which requires him, through the Standards of Conduct policy, to "treat all members of the board, all applicants who come before the board, all staff members, and the public with respect, despite differences of opinion."

Mr. Stephens violated the Standards of Conduct policy by engaging in at least two (2) confrontations with Health Department staff on or about July 1, 2024 and July 30, 2024. During the July 30, 2024 confrontation Mr. Stephens told Department members that he secretly videotaped a previous conversation in the Health Department office. As a result of Mr. Stephens' behavior during visits to Town Hall, Department employees began to lock the front door of their office. Mr. Stephens' revelation that he allegedly secretly recorded a conversation in Town Hall, and his general conduct during interactions with employees call into question public confidence in his ability to chair the Board of Health, and as such, is a violation of the Standards of Conduct policy.

There is sufficient credible evidence that Mr. Stephens violated the Standards of Conduct policy in February of 2025 by emailing unsolicited negative remarks about Department employees as part of an ongoing request to access the State's disease surveillance data system. Mr. Stephens wrote, "sorry about the lady's [sic] in the office I hope they were nice and professional I know they can be nasty sometimes" in an email to Mass DPH's Senior Surveillance Epidemiologist. Mr. Stephens' use of the word "nasty" to describe Department employees in an email to a high-ranking Mass DPH official constitutes disrespectful and unprofessional behavior by Mr. Stephens that violates the Standards of Conduct policy.

There is also sufficient credible evidence that Mr. Stephens violated the Town's Use of Electronic Mail (Email) Policy, and the Town's Policy Against Unlawful Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination on May 20, 2025 by using Town email to create an offensive message with gender-specific commentary. While Mr. Stephens may have been frustrated by the Select Board's re-appointment of another individual to the South Shore Recycling Cooperative, his use of Town email to create a disruptive message, including highly offensive and vulgar gender-specific comments in an attempt to quote alleged comments by a Department employee, is a violation of the Town's Email Policy and the Town's Policy Against Unlawful Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination.

Lastly, there is sufficient credible evidence that Mr. Stephens violated the Standards of Conduct policy and the Town's Policy Against Unlawful Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination by engaging in negative and inappropriate commentary about Department employees, and Board of Health matters on two (2) MMR Talks podcast episodes in March of 2025. Mr. Stephens

violated the Standards of Conduct policy through disrespectful remarks about another member of the Board of Health, calling them a “f***** crook.” Mr. Stephens violated the Town’s Policy Against Unlawful Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination, making a statement that referenced an employee’s age and education in a highly demeaning manner during a podcast episode.

This Investigator notes that there is sufficient credible evidence that certain Town employees were at times discourteous towards Mr. Stephens. One employee acknowledged that they used an elevated tone when speaking to Mr. Stephens. Another employee acknowledged disparaging remarks made about Mr. Stephens’ clothes. One employee made an insulting and derogatory remark to Mr. Stephens in front of other employees. Even as a response to Mr. Stephens’ behavior, employees should not be engaging in discourteous behavior towards elected officials.

June 17, 2025 Board of Health Meeting Incident

There is sufficient credible evidence that Mr. Stephens violated the Town’s Standards of Conduct Policy during his interaction with a Town resident after the June 17, 2025 Board of Health meeting. While the Town resident caused a disruption during the June 17, 2025 meeting, Mr. Stephens did not take reasonable action to avoid and cease the ensuing altercation with the resident. Department employees suggested to Mr. Stephens that he use an alternative exit to avoid any further interactions with the Town resident. Considering Mr. Stephens’ subsequent behavior of willingly engaging in conversation with the resident, this Investigator finds their statements that Mr. Stephens ignored the offer to be credible.

While video surveillance shows that Mr. Stephens originally ignored the Town resident by continuing to walk away, he also stopped on two separate occasions and allowed the Town resident catch up to him. Furthermore, Mr. Stephens’ words, while not threatening, added to the heightening conflict between himself and the Town resident. Rather than end the interaction, Mr. Stephens continued engaging with the resident, contributing to the escalation of the situation. Furthermore, witnesses indicated that Mr. Stephens was an active participant throughout the altercation. Mr. Stephens recalled defending his podcast statements and even went so far so to detail the reasons why the Town resident’s family member fit the definition of “crook.”

Lastly, there is sufficient credible evidence that Ms. Kennedy violated the Town’s Standards of Conduct Policy through her conduct during the June 17, 2025 Board of Health meeting. During the meeting, after the threatening interruption by the Town resident, Ms. Kennedy told Mr. Stephens, “Well, let’s finish the meeting and we’ll see what happens after.” As stated above, board members are expected to treat fellow members with respect and behave professionally during interactions. Ms. Kennedy did not take steps to de-escalate the situation.

VIII. Recommendations

Based on the findings of fact and conclusions above, this Investigator makes the following recommendations:

1. Mr. Stephens should receive 1-to-1 training on workplace conflict resolution and workplace civility;

2. Ms. Kennedy should receive 1-to-1 training on workplace conflict resolution and workplace civility;
3. All Department employees should receive training on workplace conflict resolution and workplace civility;
4. In order to limit Mr. Stephens' access to Town employees, the Board should consider indefinitely extending Mr. Stephens' order to not trespass in Town Hall and limit his participation in Board of Health meetings to remove access;
5. The Town Select Board should consider issuing a written notice to Mr. Stephens advising that continued improper conduct toward Town employees or representatives may expose him to personal liability.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/Jeffrey Weinstein
Jeffrey Weinstein, Esq.

Dated: October 28, 2025