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Trachtenberg seeks to meet with inspector general again

Leggett 'concerned' over allegations his office did not cooperate

by C. Benjamin Ford and Erin Cunningham | Staff Writers

A back-and-forth between Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett (D) and the county's inspector general could play out at a public meeting in April.

On Monday, Montgomery County Councilwoman Duchy Trachtenberg (D-At large) of North Bethesda asked Council President Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park to schedule an open meeting to discuss recent allegations that Leggett's office has not cooperated with investigations by the inspector general's office.

The meeting would include the council, Inspector General Thomas J. Dagley and a representative of Leggett's office, Trachtenberg said in a phone interview.

On March 16, Dagley told the council's audit committee, which Trachtenberg chairs, that some county officials have interfered with investigations by his office.

Leggett said in a memo Thursday that he was unaware of allegations that his office had not cooperated with investigations by the inspector general's office.

In the memo, which was sent to Floreen, Leggett said he was "concerned" over the allegations and how they were brought to light.

Dagley told the County Council's audit committee that some officials hampered investigations by his office into programs at the police department and Health and Human Services.

"I have never been informed of any 'impairments' from my staff nor have I been given the opportunity to respond to any lack of cooperation," Leggett wrote. "I have asked the Inspector General to identify to me as soon as possible specific areas where he has not received cooperation from Executive Branch Departments."

Leggett also asked that any conversations between the County Council and the inspector general about the allegations not take place in a closed session of the council. "That way we can address any allegations in a transparent and open setting," Leggett's memo stated.

Trachtenberg agreed with the call for an open meeting.

"I think given the fact that there have been public accusations about a lack of communication, given the fact that there is clear public concern over the inferences that were made and given the fact that all council members are aware of those interferences, it would seem to me that a full council discussion is more appropriate," she said Monday.

Floreen said Monday that she was working closely with Trachtenberg on the issue.

"We here at the council are absolutely committed to making sure that the inspector general remains effective and independent," Floreen said. "Wherever there are problems they will be resolved."

Reached Thursday, before the memo was released, Dagley declined to provide details.

"The ability of the county's inspector general office to operate without interference is an important audit committee issue, and I am confident that the council will address these issues in the coming months," Dagley said.

On Tuesday, Dagley said the meetings are a "good forum in which to share details of my concerns and those reported to me by others."

County spokesman Patrick K. Lacefield said Dagley's claims of interference should be made openly.

"We have no idea what he is talking about," Lacefield said. "We've cooperated fully with the inspector general on everything he has asked us for. Since he doesn't seem to want to offer up specifics it's hard to know what to respond to."

As a county councilman, Leggett drafted the legislation that created the inspector general's office, and he supports its work, Lacefield said.

The county created the inspector general's office in 1997 to stop instances of fraud, waste and abuse of authority.