

SENATOR MARY KIFFMEYER

District 30

President Pro Tem

Chair: State Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee
Finance Committee

Health and Human Services Finance and Policy Committee

Human Services Reform Finance and Policy Committee



Senate

State of Minnesota

August 26, 2019

Attorney General Keith Ellison
445 Minnesota Street, Suite 1400,
St. Paul, MN 55101

Attorney General Ellison,

I was troubled to read in recent media reports that your office hired an environmental lawyer with alleged financial backing from former New York City Mayor, Michael Bloomberg. Contrary to your comments in the Star Tribune, I do not believe this case is 'without merit'. I am grateful to Energy Policy Advocates and Mr. Doug Seaton for bringing this case and shining a spotlight on this situation.

Because I want a full understanding of the details around Mr. Surdo's hiring, I would like you to respond to the following questions:

1. Who is paying Mr. Surdo's salary?
2. What kind of work has Mr. Surdo been doing since he started in the Attorney General's office?
3. Who does Mr. Surdo report to? Does he report directly to you or does he report to leadership within NYU?
4. Has this kind of arrangement (placement of an attorney with connections to a special interest group) happened within the Minnesota Attorney General's office before?

I do not think it is appropriate for an attorney in the Attorney General's office to be paid for by a special interest group. The Attorney General's office should be doing work on behalf of the entire state of Minnesota instead of doing work that is a priority for a liberal nonprofit.

While we await a legal ruling, I am requesting a release of the documents related to Mr. Surdo's hiring. The release of these documents will help shed additional light on this situation and provide answers to taxpayers who are concerned about this individual's presence in the Attorney General's office.



Finally, I wanted to mention the substantive budget increase given to your office in the 2019 budget session. I would think this allocation of funds should allow you to hire an environmental lawyer to do the work of the office. I do not condone a lawyer with partisan connections and competing loyalties arguing cases on behalf of the state of Minnesota.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you would like to speak about this issue over the phone, I welcome your call. My assistant can arrange either a call or a personal meeting.

Irregardless of the outcome of the court case, I am considering legislation for this upcoming session that would prevent an arrangement like this from happening within the Attorney General's office in the future. I would welcome your input in the drafting phase.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary Kiffmeyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Senator Mary Kiffmeyer
Senate District 30