

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
State Ethics Commission
SEC-3 REVISED 11/17



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**ETHICS
COMPLAINT**

Mail completed form to:

**State Ethics Commission
Finance Building
613 North Street, Room 309
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0400**

**(717) 783-1610
1-800-932-0936
www.ethics.pa.gov**

INSTRUCTIONS – Please see reverse side of this form.

1. Identify the individual you are complaining about.

Name:	Eden Ratliff	Position or Title:	Township Manager
Address:	801 Burrows Run Rd Chadds Ford, PA 19317	Work Phone Number:	610-300-1300
		Home Phone Number:	

2. Explain in detail why you believe the individual named above may have violated the Ethics Act. Attach an extra sheet of paper if necessary.

The PA Public Official and Employee Ethics Act defines " conflict of interest " in § 1102 as: " Use by a public official or public employee of the authority of his office or employment or any confidential information received through his holding public office or employment for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, a member of his immediate family or a business with which he or a member of his immediate family is associated. "

We contend that beginning in late 2020, Kennett Township (KT) Manager Eden Ratliff repeatedly used the authority of his public office and confidential information received through his holding public office for the private pecuniary benefit of himself, at least one member of his immediate family, and a business - Longwood Fire Company (LFC) - with which he and two members of his immediate family were closely associated. Based on the definition above, we believe this constitutes one or more ' conflicts of interest. ' (Continued on attached pages)

3. Attach or make reference to any documents, materials, minutes, resolutions or other evidence which support your allegations.

Please refer to Detailed Narrative

4. Sworn to and subscribed before me this

_____ day of _____, 20__

Notary Public
My Commission Expires:

I swear or affirm, under penalty of perjury, that the facts set forth in this complaint are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. I also swear and affirm that I have read and understand the prohibited retaliation, confidentiality, penalties, and Wrongful Use of the Act provisions on the reverse side of this form.

Signature _____

Print/Type your name: Peter Doehring

Home Address: 5 Nine Gates Rd
CHadds For, PA 19317

Work Phone Number: _____

Home Phone Number: 484-784-7346

Email Address: Pjdoehring@gmail.com

COMPLAINT SUMMARY CONTINUED

Alleged Conflicts During the 2021 Fire/EMS Reorganization: Between 2/3/2021 and 4/15/2021, the KT Board of Supervisors (KT-BOS) voted to implement a series of recommendations, primarily developed and promoted by Ratliff, that resulted in a major reorganization of KT's Fire and Emergency Management Services (Fire/EMS). Previously, Longwood Fire Company (LFC) provided those services to the eastern half of the KT while Kennett Fire Company (KFC) handled the western half. As a result of this reorganization, LFC ended up with a monopoly of EMS, and a monopoly of Fire dispatching. This reorganization significantly advantaged LFC financially while significantly disadvantaging KFC. Ratliff publicly introduced the idea for such a reorganization at a KT-BOS meeting on 10/20/2020. Subsequently, Ratliff was intensively involved with conducting purportedly unbiased research and leading supposedly good faith negotiations involving KFC, LFC, and the six-municipality Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission (KFERC). However, sometime between 10/20/2020 and 4/15/2021, Ratliff, his wife, and brother became regular members of LFC volunteer staff, creating an obvious conflict of interest, given Ratliff's position. Moreover, Ratliff failed to inform KFC, KT-BOS, KFERC or the public about this conflict until 4/15/2021, the same date the final reorganization step was approved, and he admitted to it only after being questioned by a concerned KT resident. To date, no action to address this conflict has been taken by KT-BOS, his employer.

Alleged Conflicts Since the 2021 Fire/EMS Reorganization: On 8/31/2021, LFC advertised for a new paid position of Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief. The online ad specifically stated that "We are hiring an Executive Assistant to aid in our growing operation." and "The Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief will perform secretarial work of a complex nature for the Fire Chief." Further, it stated that "This position involves a high degree of confidential information to which the employee will be held accountable for not disclosing." Sometime after 8/31/2021, Ratliff's wife Gabrielle accepted this position, effective as of 10/28/2021. This has placed her in a key role at a major KT services vendor which has derived significant pecuniary advantage from the Fire/EMS reorganization recently engineered primarily by Ratliff himself. The hiring of Ratliff's wife transpired without LFC, Ratliff, or Ratliff's wife informing KT-BOS or KFERC in advance. This conflict was only discovered accidentally by a KT resident and then communicated to a KT-BOS member and subsequently confirmed by Eden Ratliff in a memo dated 11/8/2021. To date, the KT-BOS, Ratliff's employer, has taken no action to address what appears to be a clear conflict of interest.

The facts outlined in the allegations above speak for themselves. However, we have attached a detailed narrative designed to provide the Pennsylvania Ethics Commission with some additional background to better understand this complaint.

Detailed Narrative

Glossary of acronyms

‘KT’	Kennett Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania
‘LFC’	Longwood Fire Company, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania
‘KT-BOS’	Kennett Township Board of Supervisors
‘Fire/EMS’	Fire and Emergency Management Services
‘KFC’	Kennett Fire Company, Kennett Square, Pennsylvania
‘KFERC’	Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission (KFERC)
‘KSQ’	Kennett Square Borough, Chester County, Pennsylvania

Named Individuals

‘Eden Ratliff’	Kennett Township Manager
‘Gabrielle Ratliff’	Longwood Fire Executive Assistant and Eden Ratliff’s Wife
‘Scudder Stevens’	Kennett Township Supervisor
‘Richard Leff’	Kennett Township Supervisor and Board Chairman
‘Whitney Hoffman’	Kennett Township Supervisor
‘AJ McCarthy’	Longwood Fire Company Fire Chief
‘Matt Fetick’	Kennett Square Borough Mayor

Basic Timeline

8/21/2019 - KT-BOS publicly announces that Eden Ratliff has been hired to be KT Manager

9/23/2019 - Ratliff officially starts as KT Manager

Early 2/2020 - Ratliff joins KFERC as KT’s alternate voting member.

Late 2020 or early 2021 - Ratliff, his wife, and his brother become LFC volunteers

10/29/2020 - At a public KT-BOS meeting, Ratliff first proposes moving KT EMS from KFC to LFC, claiming it is a funding issue

Late 2020 - Ratliff begins a series of negotiations with KFC, LFC, and KFERC, aided by KT Supervisors Leff and Hoffman; does not reveal his association with LFC

2/3/2021 - KT-BOS approves first EMS reorganization; all KT EMS business to be moved to LFC as 3/1/2021

4/15/2021 - KT-BOS approves final EMS/Fire reorganization; KT EMS dismantled and KSQ EMS business moved to LFC as of 5/2/21; Ratliff publicly admits to his and his family's relationship to LFC

8/31/2021 - LFC advertises for a paid Executive Assistant

10/28/2021 - Ratliff's wife Gabrielle begins work as LFC's new paid Executive Assistant

11/8/2021 - Ratliff admits to his wife's recent employment at LFC

Background

For decades, Fire/EMS functions were provided for the eastern half of Kennett Township (KT) by [Longwood Fire Company](#) (LFC), and for its western half by [Kennett Fire Company](#) (KFC), which also serviced Kennett Square Borough (KSQ). While there have been occasional complaints from individual members of the public about double-billing for EMS services when both providers show up for an EMS call, KT has never before documented a pattern of poor performance by either company.

Both LFC and KFC are non-profit companies that have recently operated at a loss, as shown by their public 990 disclosures. However, LFC losses ([\\$420K in 2019](#)) have historically been far worse than KFC losses ([\\$127K in 2019](#)). This is reflective of LFC's ongoing cost structure which is far higher than that of KFC, and also far higher relative to Fire/EMS companies of similar size in this region.

LFC's large and apparently chronic deficits are due at least in part to the \$100K+ salary of its top executive, Fire Chief AJ McCarthy. Similar positions at similarly-sized Fire/EMS companies are normally volunteer. Other LFC salaries, staffing levels and equipment costs also appear to be well above average. As a result of these chronic deficits, LFC has aggressively sought rate increases and additional contributions from municipalities in its service area for many years. However, until recently, LFC's leverage has been somewhat limited by competition from lower-cost KFC.

Ratliff's Conflicts During the 2021 Fire/EMS Reorganization

On 8/21/2019, Eden Ratliff was hired by KT-BOS to become KT Manager, starting on 9/23/2019. Sometime in 2/2020, Ratliff also became KT's alternate voting member of the Kennett Fire and EMS Regional Commission (KFERC). At a [public KT-BOS meeting on 10/29/2020](#), Ratliff presented his [analysis of EMS performance and cost issues](#). Based on that report, Ratliff proposed turning all KT EMS over to LFC, although the original LFERC review did not specify a provider.

Subsequently, Ratliff, supported by Supervisors Leff and Hoffman, initiated a series of purportedly unbiased discussions with KFC related to analyzing their operations and making recommendations for improvement. During these discussions with KFC, Ratliff, positioning

himself as a neutral advisor, sifted through KFC's proprietary data, supposedly looking for opportunities to improve KFC's performance and reduce costs.

The "objective analyses" subsequently presented by [Ratliff to KT-BOS on 12/2/20](#), appeared to confirm that turning KT EMS over completely to LFC would result in a \$41K cost savings to the Township. In his presentation, Ratliff readily dismissed concerns that the 25% drop in coverage and increased risk of missed calls could create public safety problems. KT-BOS then voted 2-1 to support Ratliff's recommendation. However, in response to the vehement objections of Supervisor Stevens and many members of the public, Ratliff and Supervisors Hoffman and Leff gave LFC and KFC a deadline of 1/20/21 to come up with an alternative.

KFC soon offered to address Ratliff's concerns with their own plan involving adding paid staff, but still resulting in about the same cost savings. Without drawing on any new data or expanded rationale, [Ratliff effectively rejected that plan](#). At a public meeting on 2/3/2021, the KT-BOS majority proceeded with [Ratliff's EMS reorganization proposal](#), with Supervisor Scudder Stevens continuing his strenuous opposition. The resulting impact of Ratliff's EMS reorganization was a financial lifeline for LFC. Conversely, KFC's EMS service population was suddenly reduced by more than 60% (leaving only KSQ), which made maintaining an EMS unit financially unsustainable and potentially threatened the viability of KFC's Fire Company as well.

At that same 2/3/2021 meeting, Ratliff also began the second phase of his pre-determined reorganization plan, announcing his intention to undertake other analyses of KFC's response to fire calls ostensibly in response to an earlier [request by the KFERC](#) to re-examine "the current standard of fire service delivery in the Commission region" (see Attachment 6). In a [preliminary report presented to KT-BOS on 3/17/21](#), Ratliff claimed that KFC was missing some important performance benchmarks, primarily due to their difficulty soliciting enough volunteer firefighters.

While missing these benchmarks might normally have been some cause for concern and further study, Ratliff completely ignored the unique challenges that KFC faced in sustaining adequate levels of volunteer support during a pandemic. In subsequent presentations, Ratliff and others then used these statistics to make extremely broad and unsubstantiated assertions that KFC was regularly failing to respond properly to fires in Kennett. At no time did Ratliff ever establish a clear connection between those statistics and any real public safety concerns or specific consequences.

Nonetheless, KFC continued these negotiations in good faith and soon proposed to Ratliff that with some modest support, they could hire some additional paid firefighters to improve their response times. In response, Ratliff insisted that KT would only approve this extra support if KFC agreed to turn its EMS territory and the dispatching of fire calls entirely to LFC. In his [report to KT-BOS on 4/15/21](#) advocating for this course of action, Ratliff ignored important progress KFC had already made in the interim in recruiting volunteers and a proposal to add paid firefighters (see Attachment 9) that would be significantly less costly than the plan recommended by Ratliff. Ignoring all this, at that same 4/15/2021 meeting, the KT-BOS majority once again backed Ratliff and formally approved his recommendations, with Supervisor Stevens again strenuously objecting.

Already on a precarious financial footing as a result of Ratliff's earlier moves, KFC was left with no choice but to accept the second step of Ratliff's reorganization plan. KFC thus agreed to eliminate its EMS services by ceding its remaining KSQ territory to LFC, and to put all Fire dispatching under the control of LFC as well. The bottom line is that LFC gained a virtual monopoly of all Fire/EMS operations in both KT and KSQ, while KFC was forced to continue as a fire-only company, and largely as an appendage of LFC. Meanwhile, KSQ was forced to accept all these changes without having any real input into the decision-making process, and KT and KSQ residents were forced to accept a 25% reduction in EMS coverage hours.

Throughout the discussions leading up to this decision, there were many concerns related to Ratliff's methods and conclusions that were raised at various public and private meetings by KT Supervisor Stevens, by KSQ's Mayor Matt Fettick, and by various KT and KSQ residents. In particular, there was a sense that there had been a 'rush to judgment' based on a false urgency which had precluded taking more time to look at other alternatives. There were also complaints about misleading claims, biased analyses, policy and budget manipulation, and bad faith negotiations. These were almost universally dismissed or ignored by Ratliff and the KT-BOS majority.

During the entire reorganization process, Ratliff repeatedly claimed that the reorganization would save KT money. However, as part of the 4/15/2021 deal, LFC received one-time funding of \$300K from KFERC to implement the reorganization. In addition, LFC has already requested and is currently budgeted to receive a [32% funding increase for 2022](#), of which KT's share will be \$180K (see Attachment 10). This is on top of the additional per-incident revenues LFC is now receiving from its monopoly of EMS, which is \$200 per incident higher than KFC's rates, all paid for by affected KT and KSQ residents. It is quite clear that the reorganization has resulted in a major financial gain for LFC (both short-term and long-term) at the expense of not only KFC but also the residents and taxpayers of KT and KSQ.

As the reorganization process unfolded, there were growing concerns that Ratliff had too cozy a relationship with LFC and that he had consistently favored LFC's interests. Finally, at that same 4/15/2021 meeting that finalized the reorganization, a concerned member of the public asked Ratliff if he had any association with LFC. Ratliff then publicly admitted for the first time that he, along with his wife and brother, had for some time been volunteer staff at LFC. This was a clear conflict of interest since LFC has derived considerable pecuniary advantage from Ratliff's actions while Ratliff and his family were developing a close and previously undisclosed relationship with LFC. In any case, KFC had been unaware of Ratliff's relationship with LFC during the reorganization process and were shocked when they found out about it.

At a bare minimum, we believe that Ratliff should have first informed KFC, KT-BOS, and KFERC of the close ties he and his family had to LFC, and sought formal approval from all to continue any discussions or investigations of KFC's performance. Ratliff did nothing of the sort, further compounding this conflict. Unfortunately, KT-BOS has to date taken no steps to hold Ratliff accountable for his conflicts or to reexamine the Fire/EMS reorganization in light of this unethical conduct.

Ratliff's Conflicts Since the Fire/EMS Reorganization

In November 2021, about seven months after the Fire/EMS reorganization was complete, another concerned citizen reported to KT Supervisor Stevens that Ratliff's wife Gabrielle was now working as the paid Executive Assistant for LFC's Fire Chief. Eden Ratliff confirmed this in a memo dated 11/8/2021.

The position of Executive Assistant was originally advertised on [LFC's website](#) on 8/31/2021. That advertisement stated "We are hiring an Executive Assistant to aid in our growing operation". The [Job Description](#) offered additional details, namely that "The Executive Assistant to the Fire Chief will perform secretarial work of a complex nature for the Fire Chief", and that "This position involves a high degree of confidential information to which the employee will be held accountable for not disclosing".

LFC's employment of Ratliff's wife while Ratliff is KT Manager is another clear conflict of interest since it provides a significant pecuniary benefit to a member of his immediate family in the form of a paid position at a major services vendor to KT. In addition, having Ratliff's wife in a key position at LFC provides Ratliff with an even stronger connection to LFC and in particular, his wife's direct supervisor, LFC's Chief AJ McCarthy. This further compounds the still unresolved conflicts that took place during the reorganization.

The new conflict may also establish a pecuniary value for those previous conflicts. As noted above, the 8/31/2021 LFC Executive Assistant job advertisement states specifically that the new position was established because of "our growing operation." But that growth is largely - if not completely - due to the deal that Ratliff himself had recently negotiated.

In addition, the job description states that "Preference will be given to applicants with a relevant college degree and who are trained Fire and Emergency Medical responders" (see Appendix 12). This is not a skill normally associated with secretarial work, but it definitely provided LFC a reason to give employment preference to Ratliff's wife, who apparently has such training. In any case, KT-BOS has so far taken no action to address this additional conflict-of-interest brought on by LFC's hiring of Ratliff's wife, much less its impact on the 2021 Fire/EMS reorganization.

Conclusion and Request

The evidence clearly shows that Eden Ratliff repeatedly used his position as KT Manager to push through a major reorganization of Fire/EMS that strongly advantaged LFC at the expense of its competitor KFC and at great cost to KT and KSQ residents and taxpayers. Moreover, Ratliff did so while he and his family were working for - and developing a strong relationship with - LFC. Then, once the reorganization was complete, Ratliff's wife accepted an important paid position at LFC.

So far, the majority of KT-BOS has either ignored or denied Ratliff's pattern of blatant conflicts of interest, despite the vigorous protests of the one dissenting Supervisor and many area residents. As a result, Ratliff has not yet been held accountable for these conflicts and continues to occupy his current position, further damaging KT's interests, the public trust in KT's government, and KT's relationships with surrounding municipalities such as KSQ and other

local and regional organizations it works with. We therefore request the Ethics Commission take whatever actions are within its power to investigate these conflicts and, as appropriate, hold Ratliff accountable.