



CITY OF MILWAUKEE
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

June 3, 2026

Jackie Q. Carter
City Service Commission
Department of Employee Relations
City Hall, Room 706

Dear Director Carter:

Pursuant to Rule VIII, Section 8, we are requesting the probationary period for Public Health Laboratories Director, Dr. David Payne, be extended three (3) months to September 8, 2026. This is the first request for an extension of probation.

Background

The Public Health Laboratories Director is responsible for all activities of the City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) Public Health Laboratory and manages the public health laboratory programs for the City of Milwaukee. The Public Health Laboratories Director ensures activities contribute to the MHD mission, vision and values and that the laboratories work collaboratively on public health issues with managers from other MHD programs under the leadership of the Commissioner of Health and Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Services. In collaboration with the Commissioner of Health, other local and state agencies, local public health laboratories, clinical laboratory community and other system partners, determines the strategic direction of the laboratories; ensures that the laboratory provides relevant, accurate scientific data essential for disease prevention and control, environmental protection, developing public health policy and responding to local and area public health threats caused by common or emerging pathogens, including those that may be disseminated through deliberate acts of terrorism, and responsible for the fiscal integrity of the laboratory as well as safety, security and regulatory compliance.

Performance Concerns

Dr. Payne has been with the MHD laboratory since April of 2023, and working in his full capacity as Lab Director since June of 2025. He is the leader of the Public Health Laboratories for the MHD, and as such is expected to bring strong strategic and operational planning to the role along with consistent team leadership and communication. There are a number of areas related to leadership, communication, and planning where Dr. Payne needs additional development.

Strategic Planning and Operational Direction: Currently, there is a lack of clear strategic vision and operational direction for the laboratory, which the Lab Director is responsible for developing. Because the vision and direction are unclear, there has been a delay in addressing gaps with staffing and limited long-term planning to help prevent problems in the future. Dr. Payne is currently addressing these gaps and issues reactively rather than proactively.

Communication and Team Collaboration: Dr. Payne is responsible for the oversight of the entire laboratory, including other lab leadership (two Assistant Lab Directors, one Lab Operations Manager, and several senior-level Microbiologists and Chemists). Miscommunication among this leadership team has led to inconsistent engagement and understanding of expectations for all staff across the lab.



Personnel Management and Team Leadership: The lab director is responsible for supervising, coaching, supporting, and addressing concerns from and related to laboratory staff. Currently, Dr. Payne is inconsistent when addressing performance concerns and is providing limited support and oversight to lab leadership and staff. This has led to operational instability and has contributed to staff dissatisfaction.

Action Plan

- Dr. Payne will develop a draft strategic plan with clear goals and documented workflows
- Dr. Payne will meet regularly with lab supervisors to review staffing, performance, and operational concerns
- Dr. Payne will implement routine meetings for all lab staff with agendas and documented follow up items to ensure staff have a shared understanding of goals and expectations
- Dr. Payne will establish and maintain accountability standards for staff across the laboratory, which will allow him to address concerns fairly, professionally, and timely
- Dr. Payne will complete communication, leadership, and conflict management trainings to help build his toolkit for addressing staffing and performance concerns and managing interpersonal conflict

Conclusion

A 3-month extension of probationary period for Dr. Payne will allow him to complete additional trainings, create consistent and routine communication channels within his team, develop a 12-month strategic plan for the laboratory, and allow for observation of consistent performance change.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact Lindsey O'Connor at 414-286-6406 with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Signed by:
Michael F Totoraitis
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Michael F. Totoraitis, PhD
Commissioner of Health