



Sustainable Peacebuilding

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Alderperson DiAndre Jackson
Chairperson of the Judiciary and Legislation Committee
200 East Wells Street, Room 301
Milwaukee, WI 53202

May 31, 2024

RE: Paulina Gutiérrez's Confirmation to the Executive Director Position for the City of Milwaukee Election Commission

Dear Alder Jackson,

I am writing to provide a professional reference for Paulina Gutiérrez and to share my concerted confidence and unwavering support for her appointment as the new Executive Director for the City of Milwaukee's Election Commission. I have no doubt in my mind that she is the right person to lead our election processes and ensure their integrity.

I currently work at UWM where I direct the Peacebuilding Programs (graduate and undergraduate) which provide academic skills training and preparation for excellence in community engagement, conflict management, and systems thinking. I also serve on the Wauwatosa School Board, and am a member of Bethel-Bethany, UCC in Sherman Park, Milwaukee.

I met Ms. Gutiérrez over 15 years ago when we both participated in a professional networking project called Milwaukee Mosaic; we were matched as Mosaic partners. We quickly found similarities of interest in strengthening communities and expanding inclusive participation across all sectors. As a person more advanced in age and experience in the academic arena I served as a mentor as well as a colleague at times when we offered community services around conflict mediation.

Ms. Gutiérrez has served Milwaukee and the State of Wisconsin in several capacities over her impressive career in community leadership. She has the perfect mix of experiences to bring strong leadership to the elections commission in Milwaukee. Moreover, she has professional training in dispute resolution, experience interacting with city and state leaders, and a calm mind and confident presence in the face of multiple simultaneous demands. In addition, she works tirelessly at any project, produces on time, cares deeply about being authentic, accountable, empathetic, and persistent through achieving a constructive and amenable outcome. Her intellectual humility makes her a great colleague as she is not opposed to being coached, taking feedback, or redirecting efforts toward productive solutions.

For all these reasons, when in the past offered the chance to have her to teach one of our classes I was thrilled. She is an outstanding instructor and, well prepared to lead the City of Milwaukee's Elections Commission. Let me expand a bit more on why:

- As mentioned above she has professional training in understanding and working through conflict and controversy and as a student at Marquette University trained to become a Restorative Justice leader and mediator. Later as a graduate she went on to work with retired Supreme Court Justice Janine Geske, facilitating restorative justice circles inside of prisons. Ms. Gutiérrez then worked with a local organization where she connected with the same young men upon their return to our

communities, helped them to access community programming, where she learned at great depth about challenges facing Milwaukee neighborhoods, and promoted community healing.

· Her early career developed her skills in listening to and collaborating with communities in need. She lived out the essence of democracy and our Wisconsin values by tirelessly advocating for public safety resources and ensuring that residents had access to essential services. Drawing from her own experiences as a child of immigrants, and later a parent with many economic burdens, she gained firsthand knowledge of systemic challenges faced by people in our community. This deep understanding is invaluable for effective leadership of such an important office as the Election Commission. Her work on policy development and program implementation is grounded in both life knowledge and an excellent education. Her skills at working with a diverse community, law enforcement, and political entities to reach common goals and solutions are important to the future of Milwaukee.

· As her career developed and when working for the City of Milwaukee previously, Ms. Gutiérrez was instrumental in coordinating and developing the vision of a unified 911 center. She is an outstanding systems thinker and skilled listener, as such she was able to assist local elected officials to navigate the complexities of emergency communications. Her leadership skills were critical to the success of a multi-disciplinary team creating the initial plans of an enterprise-wide system.


· Most recently she has brought her skills developed in state-level government and in the non-profit sector back to support the needs and goals of the City of Milwaukee. I remember well when she told me how she was returning to city administration and the joy on her face and the excitement in her voice about being able to contribute again to the place she calls home. She is a dedicated public servant and a thoughtful leader with so much preparation to make a positive impact wherever she works.

Without reservations I recommend Ms. Gutiérrez for this significant leadership role.

Throughout her career she has taken on complex challenges in a wide range of specialized fields including emergency management, juvenile corrections, police/community relations, and restorative justice. As an instructor in our program, I was able to observe that she understands at great depth what it means to work with fairness, inclusive excellence, and transparency. In my experience she completes her work with professionalism, leadership, and has many skills that enable her to learn from others and to solve complicated issues.

Thank you for your time. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,



Lynne M. Woehrle, PhD

Associate Professor, School of Nursing, Director of Peacebuilding Programs

Graduate: <https://uwm.edu/nursing/academics/masters/msp/>

Undergraduate: <https://uwm.edu/nursing/academics/certificates/peace-studies-conflict-resolution/>