

# FDIC News

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation Employee Newsletter

JUNE 2021

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## FDIC's Internal Ombudsman's Office Empowers Employees to Raise and Resolve Workplace Issues and Concerns

By AYANNA EPPS AND NIGEL FRANKLIN  
Internal Ombudsman Specialists

Employees at all levels of the agency face a variety of challenges every day. Disagreements and differences of opinion at work happen all the time, even among the best performing teams. While the majority of these challenges are successfully addressed and resolved in the daily course of our work, there are times when a challenge can lead to various work-related issues or concerns.

"Believe it or not, disagreements and differences of opinion are a good thing as they can encourage creativity and lead to innovation and positive change," says FDIC Internal Ombudsman Robert Harris. At the same time, workplace challenges that escalate can be destructive to teams and organizational culture, and can also lead to harmful consequences for individuals and organizational performance.

### Providing Informal Assistance

In 2012, the FDIC created the In-

ternal Ombudsman's Office (IO), a confidential, neutral, and independent resource that provides informal assistance to all employees to address work-related issues and concerns. Since its inception, the IO has provided informal assistance to address and resolve approximately 185 employee work-related issues and concerns per year. Approximately half of the cases are raised by Regional/Field Office employees, and the other half are from Headquarters employees.

The range of concerns brought to the attention of the IO is broad. They include questions about work policy; challenges related to interpersonal problems; the impact of leadership and organizational change; assistance with career development, human resource matters, and access to programs or accommodations; and any other area that impacts the mission of a Division or Office or the FDIC as a whole.

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# EMPOWERING EMPLOYEES TO RESOLVE WORKPLACE ISSUES

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## Empowering Employees to Resolve Workplace Issues

A common misconception about the IO is that it will take an employee's case and independently resolve it. In reality, IO staff work to empower employees to raise and resolve workplace issues themselves, using a number of strategies and informal alternative dispute resolution techniques, such as facilitation and coaching.

"We coach employees to address the situation on their own, work with management or other Divisions/Offices to review and fairly address concerns, facilitate meetings involving employees and those they are having difficulties with, and may serve as an accountability mechanism once the issue or concern has been effectively addressed," Harris says.

### Confidentiality is Key

Confidentiality is one of the key tenets of the IO. As part of the case intake process, employees are assured that IO staff will not disclose or discuss

any confidential matter without their permission to the extent permitted by law, nor will they share the employee's name, unless there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm to an individual or the FDIC. About one-half of those that engage IO ask staff not to share their names within their chain of command. However, they sometimes give partial permission to talk with others in support offices, like Human Resources or OMWI.

For example, an employee may be concerned that they were not selected for a promotion or a detail opportunity. The employee may not give IO staff permission to reach out to the hiring manager, but might give IO permission to reach out to Human Resources staff to try and gain a better understanding of why they were not selected. In some cases, IO staff are able to gather enough information this way; in others cases, it may be important to reach out to the hiring manager to get a full understanding.

"In these situations, if employees are still concerned about sharing

their name, we will often coach them to reach out to the selecting manager themselves. After receiving coaching assistance, most employees feel empowered to either approach the other person directly or give IO staff permission to reach out to the Division/Office or hiring manager," says Harris.

### Contributing to a Culture of Excellence

"Employees reach out to us with important issues and concerns, and really want help addressing them," Harris says. "My long-term vision for the office is to help FDIC employees feel valued, important, empowered, and committed to their work, their colleagues, and the FDIC mission by continuing to help them address and resolve their issues and concerns."

"Work-related disagreements and differences of opinion are inevitable. I want the Internal Ombudsman's office to continue to help build and sustain a culture of excellence for all employees at the FDIC." 🏆

## MOVING ON

**Name:** Russell Pittman

**Most recent position:** Senior Special Advisor to the CIO

**Division:** Chief Information Officer Organization

**Location:** Headquarters - Washington, DC

**When and where joined the FDIC:** I joined in August 2003 in the Washington Technology Information Management (TIM)/Division of Information and Resource Management (DIRM).

**Career highlights:** I am most proud of the teamwork DIT staff exhibited during the financial crisis. While there were bumps along the road, we all pulled together to support the mission and succeeded. Leading this group of technology professionals was the highlight of my career.

**Retirement Date:** May 22, 2021

**Plans for retirement:** I look forward to spending time with the family

before the kids (young adults) go off to their careers. I hope to work on many projects around the house, do some hiking, biking, kayaking and shooting trap/skeet and archery. I also volunteer with several non-profit organizations. The Scouts take up a lot of my time, but I also hope to work on conservation projects and do some work with Habitat for Humanity. When my wife retires, and COVID is over, we will travel again to see all those places we have talked about over the years.

**Comments and thoughts:** The FDIC has some of the most talented and dedicated IT staff I have ever worked with. However, getting the mission done takes cooperation with individuals in many Division/Offices. I have been pleased with the support provided to me and DIT over the years. Thanks to all who were there



**Russell Pittman**

when needed and hopefully the IT staff delivered the business solutions you needed. 🏆

## MOVING ON

**Name:** Paul Robillard

**Most recent position:** Project Manager

**Division:** DIT

**Location:** Headquarters - Virginia Square, 3701 Building

**When and where joined the FDIC:** I joined the FDIC initially in 2002 at the VSQ campus. I left after 3 years and returned in 2010.

**Career highlights:** At the undergraduate level, I had a double major in math and economics, and a double minor in French and International Relationship. At the graduate level, I studied Policy Analysis and IT management in large government agencies. In school, I was the foreign student coordinator. After graduation, I joined the USDA as a budget/financial analyst. Yes, I worked on the President's Budget and worked with OMB to upload the budget in the Max System. It was exciting! Then I left to become an IT project manager, implementing projects in more than 15 countries throughout the world. I was in a different country every three weeks or so. After a while I became travel weary, and that's when I joined the FDIC as an IT specialist. After a few years, I went to the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation (PBGC) and returned to the FDIC as an IT project manager, working on implementing various projects throughout the corporation.

**Retirement Date:** May 31, 2021

**Plans for retirement:** I am a servant at heart. I've always held public service in high regard. So, I went to school to

become a public servant. I felt it was my calling. So, in retirement, I will continue to be a servant. I would like to teach the Bible, open a charity and help kids in Haiti, the Caribbean, and Africa. I would like to help young men and women in these communities to start micro businesses through micro loans. The level of violence in our communities in this country and the countries mentioned above concerns me much. I would like to work to reduce this level of violence. I've been given much, many people have invested their time and talents in me. I feel it's my turn to give back in whatever capacity that I can.

**Comments and thoughts:** I've learned many things throughout my careers. I've been blessed to be part of this great agency. The notion that public servants whether men or women, black, white or any ethnicity in between are not hard working is a myth that has been busted, at least in my experience. I've met some of the most brilliant people I've had the privilege to work with in the Federal government and especially at the FDIC. And, they care.

But there are two things that no business classes I've taken or books I've read have prepared me for: 1) I didn't expect to meet God while working in the Federal Government, and 2) I didn't expect that my friends and colleagues were going to have a lifelong, eternal impact in my life. I started working at the USDA unsaved. I didn't know the Lord, Jesus Christ. Then a colleague, African- America, invited me to church. Another, older Caucasian



**Paul Robillard**

male, told me about his mission trip. Notice they were Caucasian, African-American and didn't care about my color, race, or creed. A team lead I worked with would pray before lunch and share a verse with me on occasion. I was intrigued. Why would someone who was handsome, possibly rich would believe in God and pray, I asked myself. That led me to read the Bible and before long I accepted Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. Little did they know that I would be among the first ones in my family line to be born-again. Shortly thereafter, my mom, siblings, and friends started receiving Jesus Christ. So, a big thank you to all my colleagues at the FDIC for everything. You've been more important and impactful in my life than you know. 🙏

## MOVING ON

**Name:** Penny Bouknight

**Most recent position:** Executive Assistant to three of the Chairman's Deputies (External Affairs (Arleas Upton Kea); Financial Stability (Arthur J. Murton); and Consumer Protection and Innovation (Leonard N. Chanin))

**Division:** Executive Office

**Location:** Headquarters

**When and where joined the FDIC:** I joined the FDIC in 1989.

**Career highlights:** Legal Division, Legal Secretary (Bob Russell, then Jock Banks)

Detail to former Office of Diversity and Economic Opportunity (ODEO), currently Office of Minority and Women Inclusion (OMWI), Secretary to the Director (Mickey Collins)

Corporate University, Secretary to the Chief Learning Officer (Starr Ramieh, then Dave Cooke)

Division of Administration (DOA) (Arleas Upton Kea)

Executive Office | Exec Assistant to Chairman's Deputies: Chief Operating Officer and Deputy to the Chairman | Deputy to Chairman for External Affairs (Arleas Upton Kea) | Deputy to Chairman for Financial Stability (Art Murton) | Deputy to Chairman for Consumer Protection and Innovation (Leonard Chanin)

**Retirement Date:** June 30, 2021

**Plans for retirement:** First I am going to truly be retired – not get up early, and spend loads of time with my husband - Johnnie. Also spend lots of time with

the children, grandchildren and other family locally and in MD, VA, SC, and FL. Follow up on interests with my baby sister - Yvette. Mostly spend time enjoying my family, hobbies and many interests.

**Comments and thoughts:** I joined the FDIC in 1989 coming from the former Federal Home Loan Bank Board (FHLBB)/Federal Savings and Loan Insurance Corporation (FSLIC) and briefly with the Office of Thrift Supervision (OTS). I have had the pleasure of working with some of the most amazing professionals and leaders. I appreciated the comradery of working closely with so many outstanding people. I greatly appreciate the high caliber of leaders ... Jack Smith, Dorothy Nichols, Bob Russell, Jock Banks, Mickey Collins (may he continue to rest in peace), Starr Ramieh, Dave Cooke (may he rest in peace), and so many others. Plus I have the pleasure of closing out my federal career working with Arleas Upton Kea and her teams (hey Dan Bendler – smile). I can honestly say that no one assignment has been the highlight of my career because I feel like my entire career has been the highlight. I feel like Confucius hit the nail on the head when he said “choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life.” I've been excited to come to work ... most of the time ... and have had the honor of making lifelong familiships and friendships. (Ok I made up the word familiships – smile – but that's



**Penny Bouknight**

what so many of my work relationships feel like to me).

No matter what my job titles have been over the years, I've had the pleasure of being challenged to not limit myself to what a job description outlines, but to see and reach for so much more with great support from my leadership. I encourage those that remain here in the midst of your careers to do that for yourselves too – partner with your leadership for you and their good. It can only make both of you shine brighter!

BLESSED is what I have been throughout my career. I want to thank each of every one of my colleagues for making my time here at the FDIC so personally rewarding to and for me – THANK YOU. 🙏

## MOVING ON

**Name:** Patty Oswald

**Most recent position:** Field IT Specialist

**Division:** DIT

**Location:** Kansas City Regional Office

**When and where joined the FDIC:** I joined FDIC's Kansas City Regional Office on September 10, 1979.

**Career highlights:** I began my FDIC journey as a Grade 2 Clerk/Typist in the Kansas City Regional Office typing pool re-typing exam reports. My mother encouraged me to take the Civil Service exam (that's a blast from the past) so she always took a little bit of credit for my successes. FDIC was the first and only application I submitted and I knew right away that the FDIC was the place for me and I most likely would be a "lifer". I was always fortunate to be in the right place at the right time throughout my career giving me the opportunity to learn new technology as it was introduced to the Corporation – beginning with WANG Word Processors, continuing on in an administration role for each new system to come around. It's been exciting to always be on the front lines of new technology. There's been some blood,

sweat and tears (for real) along the way and some very long nights during deployments and network events, but I wouldn't trade any of it because there's also been lots of laughter and good times.

**Retirement Date:** June 3, 2021

**Plans for retirement:** My passions are my family, Disney and travel. I currently have one Disneyland, two Walt Disney World and three Disney cruises planned; those trips with my family will keep my busy for a while! In the "off" travel times I'll be spending time with my grandchildren (if they aren't traveling with me), planning more trips and doing some volunteer work with my church. I hope to visit all 50 states as well as Italy in the coming years.

**Comments and thoughts:** It's been almost 42 years of working for one of the best places with the best people. I'm thankful to have been presented with some amazing opportunities to grow and learn. I'm sad to leave behind my FDIC family that have become life-long friends, but excited to begin this new adventure!

My words of wisdom are: FDIC is a great place to work, but always



**Patty Oswald**

remember why you are working and don't let your work responsibilities overtake your life. It's important to maintain a good work/life balance, if you do that you will be successful in all areas of your life and a much happier person.

"You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think." – Pooh, *Winnie-The-Pooh*. 🏠