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Port Commission Places Executive Director on Paid Administrative Leave

RICHLAND, Wash. – The Port of Benton Commission has placed executive director Diahann Howard on paid administrative leave pending the outcome of an internal review. This action was approved during a Special Commission Meeting on January 7, 2026.

To ensure continuity of operations and effective management during this period, the Commission has authorized Commission President Bill O’Neil to oversee next steps, including the appointment of an interim executive director.

Because this is a confidential personnel matter, the Port will not be providing additional details at this time. The Port remains committed to a fair, thorough, and impartial process consistent with its responsibilities as a public agency and employer.

Commission President Bill O’Neil emphasized the Port’s commitment to maintaining a professional and respectful workplace.

“Our employees deserve a safe and supportive environment, and the community deserves confidence in how we operate. The Commission is taking appropriate steps to address workplace concerns responsibly while ensuring uninterrupted port operations,” O’Neil said. “We appreciate the professionalism of our staff during this process and remain committed to transparency to the extent permitted by law and best practices.”

The Port will share updates, if and when appropriate, upon the conclusion of the review.

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