

Tougher background checks sought for Contra Costa County workers

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MARTINEZ — Supervisors on Tuesday asked for improved, and more specific, screening procedures for evaluating and hiring Contra Costa County employees, especially those who would have regular contact with children.

Supervisors mentioned no names but were clear that the issue of background checks was driven by the story of Suzanne Porter, a former social worker. Neither her domestic violence restraining order nor her participation in the notorious “Dirty DUI” scandal in which she helped illegally entrap her ex-husband on drunken driving charges were uncovered before she was hired in November 2014.

Likewise, the supervisors’ staff report makes no mention of what specifically prompted reexamining hiring procedures, instead including language about “promoting consistency in hiring practices and job-related screening” and “to protect the safety and security of employees, clients, residents and the public.” Several supervisors said they need more.

“It’s a start,” Supervisor John Gioia of Richmond said of the guidelines, adding he wanted more stringent requirements for people being considered for jobs in “sensitive positions that affect children.”

Other supervisors agreed. Supervisor Karen Mitchoff of Concord said, “We want civil background checks; civil issues are already public record.”

Porter was employed by the county for about 2½ years. She left her job in April, a few weeks after the East Bay Times published an opinion column questioning how the issues in Porter’s background weren’t discovered.

The column also criticized a county official quoted as saying, “We don’t consider it relevant what’s going on in (prospective hires’) personal lives.”