

July 29, 2010

Dear Members of the City Council and City Manager Young:

We are writing to express our deep concern about the city's handling of the ongoing series of controversies surrounding the Greensboro Police Department and to make specific requests of the city manager and the city council.

Much of the controversy swirling around the police department is racial in nature and most of the public expressions of concern about the department have come from the African American and Latino communities. Those of us signing this letter are White. We have been listening to the varying and complex stories of those who feel mistreated by the police department and we feel compelled to get involved and to call on citizens of all races to get involved. Our city's leaders need the community's help to get the police department back on track. Like everyone involved, we are grateful for the work of our city's police and we know that the vast majority of the police department employees are doing their work in good faith. They too need the community's help and support.

While average citizens do not have access to the details of every controversial issue, the pattern of internal turmoil, of racially-based charges and countercharges between citizens and police and among a wide range of officers and their superiors, makes it clear that there are deep systemic problems in the police department. It is also clear that the city does not have a handle on these systemic problems or their causes.

The city is now rushing to hire a new police chief to coincide with the July 31 retirement of current Chief Bellamy. Two finalists have been announced. But there were immediate concerns raised about one of the finalists and about the hiring process itself, as described in these excerpts from a July 25th Greensboro News and Record editorial:

Chicago-area media reports say (finalist Lisa) Womack was placed on administrative leave by Elgin's city council March 10 and given 21 days to resign or be fired. The question is why. Last week, Greensboro leaders who selected Womack as a finalist still did not know the answer... The city set up several panels to interview and evaluate the candidates. Members represent a cross-section of the community, as well as people from public-safety organizations and police officers... Unfortunately, the public wasn't allowed to view these panel sessions or meet the finalists in any other forum. The more public interaction candidates for such an important position have, the better. After all, a police chief serves the entire community... it would have been better to let community panelists take a look at all six candidates who were considered semifinalists. The names of the other four have not been released. As it is, the final pairing seems too narrow — especially with unanswered questions about Womack.

*Our first request is for the city manager to put the police chief hiring process on hold.*

We do not believe that a new chief should step in until the city gains a real understanding of the department's systemic problems and their causes - and explains this

to the community in a way that begins to rebuild broad trust in the department. With this understanding, the hiring process could then be embraced by the community as a new beginning for the police department.

How can the city and the community gain this understanding? A growing number of African American and Latino leaders are calling for a US Justice Department investigation of the police department. We believe that such an impartial investigation is necessary.

*Our second request is for the city council and city manager to ask for a US Justice Department investigation of the police department.*

We further believe that Chief Bellamy should be available to actively provide information during this investigation. Much has happened during his relatively short tenure.

*Our third request is that the city manager act to ensure retiring Chief Bellamy's active participation in a US Justice Department investigation.*

We believe that this crisis provides Greensboro with an opportunity - an opportunity for citizens of all races to come together in new ways to help our city solve a seemingly intractable problem. We look forward to being actively involved.

We know that a decision on the hiring of the chief may be imminent, so we ask that Mr Young reply as expeditiously as possible. Please direct your reply to A.C. "Chip" Marble Jr., Assisting Bishop, Diocese of North Carolina at this email address - Alfred.Marble@episdionc.com.

Respectfully,

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