

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

"A World Class City"

Human Rights Commission

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www.charlottesville.gov/963/Human-Rights-Commission



November 9, 2021

Charlottesville City Council
P.O. Box 911
Charlottesville, Virginia 22902

Re: Inequities related to City staff of color

Dear Mayor Walker, Vice Mayor Magill, and Councilors:

The Human Rights Commission is deeply concerned about the recent firing of Police Chief Brackney and the departure of many other individuals of color from the City. While there has been much discussion about the reasons for the firing of the police chief, those explanations have been wholly inadequate. Based on the limited information released to date, the most likely conclusion one could plausibly reach to explain the termination is that the City was uncomfortable with the significant reforms the Chief was seeking to make. We call upon the City to do better and to explain clearly the reasons for termination.

The poorly explained decision to terminate the police chief only highlights several systemic issues. The City has lost a shocking number of African-American staff in recent days. Our discussions with current staff of color reveal that many staff feel undervalued and forgotten, as there is keen interest focused on those who have left, and little attention paid to those who remain. And, while we have substantial concerns about the retention of Black and Brown employees, we are similarly concerned about other existing inequities.

In August of 2019, the City Council was presented with a document entitled "Report and Recommendations from the City Manager's Advisory on Organizational Equity." That report identified serious issues with compensation and found that "it is clear that black employees generally earn less than their white colleagues in most roles and in most payband categories." It also found that the "salary data reveal that white and Asian employees earn above the average salary for city employees, and black employees earn less. Black employees earn significantly less than the average salary in the professional bands."

This report recommended that the City engage in "additional professional data analysis to understand the extent of salary inequity more completely." The report went on to recommend:

"the need for several internal structures to support the city's growth and development in this area. These structures included a standing office and strategic goals around equity. The committee spent considerable time addressing the concern

that these new structures would be insufficient without significant investment in changing the culture internally. As a result, the recommendations to follow include expectations for investment in staff education in the areas of racial awareness and sensitivity, understanding of white advantage and white privilege, and improving staff capacity to engage in challenging and uncomfortable conversations.”

Given this, the Human Rights Commission urges you to take the following immediate actions:

- Prioritize the publication, with a sense of urgency, of an updated equity report as soon as a Director of Human Resources is in place. This report should outline the steps that have been taken since August 2019 to make the City a good employer for people of color.
- We understand that there is funding for a compensation and class study that would work on this issue from an internal equity standpoint. However, the study has been held up for lack of an HR Director. We urge you to prioritize this study by the incoming HR Director.
- Share with the public the full basis for termination of Chief Brackney. Without a full assessment of the reasons for this termination, the City will be unable to heal, and the Black community will continue to have a strong basis for distrust of the City as an employer and as a governing entity.
- Make a concrete plan to continue the departmental reforms Chief Brackney was working on and publish that plan immediately. This should include an exploration as to whether further changes Chief Brackney was examining could be adopted without delay.
- Consider policy changes that would make the Charlottesville Police Department a more equitable department. Specifically, the City should evaluate the work previously done by the Human Rights Commission related to bias-based policing, spearheaded by civil rights attorney Catherine Spear.

The justifiable anger felt by community members must be addressed by the City Council with an honest and transparent review of what has happened and a plan to move forward with an eye toward racial justice. Without those things, there will be neither justice nor trust.

Sincerely,

Mary Bauer

Mary Bauer
Chair, Human Rights Commission

Human Rights Commissioners:

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- Kathryn Laughon (Vice-Chair)
- Jeanette Abi-Nader
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