

# Shannon Dandridge

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**August 10, 2016**

**Sir:**

I wanted to take the time today to write an exit interview, in order to clear up the reasons for my departure from the City of Ferguson.

First, I'd like to say, I feel as though I've always given 110% to this department and have enjoyed my 13 years here at Ferguson. I had always planned to be a life time employee here and I look at my fellow employees as family but unfortunately due to frustrations and many times the lack of action by city hall and the council, I find it time to sever my ties with the City of Ferguson. Of course, the last few years have been a challenge for us at the PD, but I loved the way we all banded together to try and accomplish our goals.

With that being said, this is where my frustrations began. I was budgeted in the dispatch center for 7 full time dispatchers and 10 part time dispatchers up until July 1, 2016. The new budget was reduced to 5 full time and unlimited part-time dispatchers. With a budget of only 18,400 hours since budget year 2009 (things have changed a great deal), you can see where this would be a problem. From that number of 18,400 hours I have to staff dispatch, complete continuing education, cover vacation days, sick days, personal days, and bonus time. So as you can imagine, that doesn't leave many hours to train a new dispatcher. According to our policy it take 100 work days and approximately 3 weeks at the academy to properly train a newly hired dispatcher. It should be noted that we are not in compliance according to industry standards with staffing 911 lines due to the shortage of personnel in the communications center. An example just recently occurred when we had an over turned car and only one dispatcher on duty. Due to the overflow of several 911 calls they were not all answered, and officers, ambulance and fire were sent to the wrong location because the first caller gave the incorrect location. This could've been prevented had we had more staff. It is also important to know the dispatchers are not getting breaks or even able to leave the room, which is leading to fatigue. Mistakes are going to happen, someone is going to get hurt, whether a citizen or officer, and this is where the city will loose on the liability aspect.

- I began requesting to hire additional part time dispatchers in September of 2015. On September 24, 2015 Mr. Blume agreed that we would hire 2 additional part-time employees and begin the training process.
- On September 28, 2015 a meeting was scheduled with Mr. Young, our HR manager at the time. It was decided that we would begin the application process. We

accepted applications, did interviews and hiring was put on hold by the city manager.

- October 30, 2015 a Full-Time dispatch position was posted and Mrs. Wegert was chosen for that position. However, she was not promoted until February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016.
- December 1, 2015, Mr. Unrein again gave approval to hire 3 more part-time dispatchers but still declined to move Mrs. Wegert into the full-time position. Again, no one was hired.
- December 21<sup>st</sup> I was notified by Mr. Blume that the dispatch budget was over by 30%. Please note that several weeks during that year dispatchers were mandatory to work during crisis events, days off were cancelled and 12 hour shifts were assigned. During this time period, I was disciplined by recommendation of the Acting city manager for over scheduling dispatcher Wegert who was covering sick time for a full time employee. A meeting occurred with Mr. Blume, Capt. DeCarli, Mrs. Simmons and myself to further discuss the limited hours to use for staffing. I explained that we were creating a danger for the citizens and officers being so short staffed. At that point Mr. Blume got upset and told me if I continued to talk about officer safety I'd be ask to leave his office. The meeting ended with great frustration on my part.
- January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016, I was asked to give my opinion on staffing in the communications center, in order to cover us during peak times. I completed that request.
- February 15<sup>th</sup> 2016, I was notified we had received over 300 resumes for the part-time position, but in order to hire and train them it would come out of my 18,400 hour budget. There was absolutely no way to accomplish training a new hire and properly staff the communications center on the strict budget.
- On April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016 I requested a meeting with the City manager in reference to hiring. That meeting was denied and I was informed via email that no additional hiring could occur at this time.
- April 27<sup>th</sup>, 2016 I again expressed my concern to command staff that the dispatch center was 3 part-time employees short and the amount of hours allowed by the budget were not adequate to properly perform the job and keep everyone safe.
- On June 22, 2016, it was decided that the new budget would only allow for 5 full time dispatchers and unlimited part-time dispatchers. I was also informed the corrections center would be closing and being that the corrections officers were cross trained on telephones, they would be offered the opportunity to be transferred to communications. Well...as we all know the jail is still open and functioning to this day without a budget an no input by the City Manager as to when St. Ann will be taking over. Our jail is only functioning as a part-time jail.

- July 19<sup>th</sup>, 2016 I again expressed my concern to command staff that all but 2 of my dispatchers have gained additional employment, and now have limited hours to dedicate to Ferguson.

I would also like to point out that I spent about 120 hours working with the consultant hired by the City of Ferguson to complete a staffing study. Mr. Bellmio and I worked together to make sure all numbers were accurate and to complete a very detailed staffing study. Mr. Bellmio concluded due to our call volume, radio traffic, paper work, CJIS compliance validations, and business lines we needed a minimum of 11 full time and about 4 part-time dispatchers. So, after all this work that was completed with accurate data, it was decided to reduce manpower to five and unlimited part-time but still only allow 18,400 hours. I'm still confused why our city paid so much for this study and it's not being used or even considered.

I would also like to note that we are now down 19 Officers in the patrol division. We have 3 officers backgrounds completed and ready to be hired for over 4 months. I don't understand how the City of Ferguson has had a hiring freeze when we are so short on the street. This is completely unsafe for the officers to continue at this rate, much less not providing adequate protection to the citizens we serve. And long response times to priority calls due to lack of officers on the street. Everyone is becoming fatigued, overly stressed and unable to do proactive patrols due to the short staff. Again, why are we not taking the advice of Mr. Bellmio when he recommended 52 officers in order to comply with the consent decree? He felt 52 officers was the "MINIMUM" amount to complete Neighborhood Policing model and be successful. So....what does the city do? Reduce the budget to 44 officers and then let that amount drop to 36 officers during the hiring freeze. Talk about officer safety.....Why did we sign the consent decree if we had no intention of fulfilling our obligations?

I feel like the entire police and fire department were used as pawns in a game of pass the utility tax. We had hiring freezes, although the money was in the budget for hiring dispatchers and police officers. The only thing accomplished was overwork and tire the employees out and further lower the morale. So was intentional shortage a way to show the community how short we were in order get them to vote for the tax increase? Rumor has it the city used the shortage of the officers and closing fire house 2 as the sympathy getter to get the votes needed to pass the tax.

It greatly saddens me all the excellent employees that the City of Ferguson has lost due to lack of communication and uncertainty. We've had dispatchers and officers with 18 years of experience and knowledge just walk out the door solely because of frustrations in dealing with city hall. We have hit a critical point and I see no end in sight. I don't feel at this point we can properly staff the dispatch center to keep the community and officers safe. Something needs to be done immediately! After over 26 years working in law enforcement I've never seen such a disconnect between a city and its police department.

Police employees that have left repeat the same sad story, we are tired of reading the future of our jobs in the Post Dispatch instead of hearing from city hall. We are disappointed when the public is told by the Mayor at the last council meeting that the Police Department is down to 44 officers when really we are down to 36 officers. Don't you think the public needs to know the truth??

Budget meetings.....Why are department heads and employees ask to attend but not allowed to speak or give input or answer questions? We have the answers but you refuse to ask and just assume what you think is correct! Why even waste our time in attending the meetings? I invited and begged each of you to come look around, learn and understand the ins and outs of the communications center. I hoped you would all be able to gain knowledge before decisions were made to the budget. But no one seemed interested in the invitations; although a few of you made mention that it wasn't allowed that we communicate with each other. Why you were not allowed to communicate with us??? So sad.

So I will close with thanking you for allowing me to be part of the city for over 13 years. But I can no longer be apart as I am afraid of the liability that I am accepting by keeping my position in Ferguson. If things do not change immediately there is a tragedy waiting just around the corner.

Sincerely,

**Shannon Dandridge**