

OREGON STATE LODGE FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE



Daniel E. Thenell

Admitted in Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah & Alaska

www.oregonfop.com

Dan@thenelllawgroup.com

P: (503) 372-6450

F: (503) 372-6496

6 Centerpointe Drive, Ste 450
Lake Oswego, OR 97035

1030 N Center Pkwy
Kennewick, WA 99336

VIA EMAIL ONLY

Hon. Kathy Sell
Mayor
City of Eagle Point
17 Buchanan Avenue South
Eagle Point, Oregon 97524

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106p2-11

To Mayor Sell and City Council of The City of Eagle Point:

I write this letter today on behalf of the Eagle Point Police Officer's Association, ("The Association"). The Association is one of approximately 75 law enforcement labor groups in the State of Oregon represented by the Oregon Fraternal Order of Police Labor Coalition. This letter is intended to convey to the City Council the Association has unanimously passed a vote of no confidence against City Administrator Aaron Prunty and Human Resources/Finance Director Melissa Owens. The Association believes both should be immediately placed on administrative leave while an outside investigation is conducted into the allegations specified below. We also write to voice our support specifically and expressly for Chief Jim Hamilton.

The Association recently learned that Chief Jim Hamilton tendered his resignation to the city. We believe Chief Hamilton's reason for tendering his resignation is due to malfeasance, poor judgment and interference from Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens in the operations of the Eagle Point Police Department.

There were two incidents that were particularly impactful for the department. First, Mr. Prunty personally mistreated a city employee recently and threatened to take money from the police department budget over a code enforcement issue. Mr. Prunty

wrote a completely inappropriate memo to the Chief of Police over the incident based on partial and misunderstood information.

Second, Ms. Owens and Mr. Prunty have made it virtually impossible to fill two Sergeant positions in the Police Department. Sergeants are widely considered to be one of the most important positions within a law enforcement agency. Additionally, sergeants are vital positions for law enforcement leadership succession planning. Shortly after Chief Hamilton arrived at the city, the Association agreed to allow Sergeants to be moved out of the Association. The Agreement was made upon the condition that two Sergeant positions would be created so the Sergeants could start their own collective bargaining unit. Recruitment outside the department has not been successful.

A very qualified internal candidate applied for the position and was told he needed to prove himself further to earn the spot. After 18 months of added responsibility and training, the internal candidate was offered the Sergeant position. The offer consisted of low pay and the removal of benefits and incentives the officer was receiving. Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens, in violation of the Fair Labor Standards Act, refused to make this position eligible for overtime. Because of Ms. Owens and Mr. Prunty, no internal candidates are interested in this position. This refusal to follow federal law should alone cause concern to the city.

Two additional broad concerns are as follows. First, there exists a documented, years-long pattern of employees leaving City employment due to conditions created under Ms. Owens' and, in some cases, Mr. Prunty's management. These include:

- a. In October 2021, the then-Public Works Director/City Engineer who had served the City for over a decade was terminated on issues brought forth by Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens. Prior to termination, this employee had identified several unethical and inefficient practices and brought forth this information to Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens.
- b. Also in 2021, a long-standing City/police department employee resigned due to a hostile work environment and lack of trust created by Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens.
- c. Also in 2021, an accounting supervisor resigned due to a toxic work environment. The employee was not allowed to properly discipline subordinates, which undermined the employee's authority and effectiveness with those the employee supervised. Ms. Owens prevented the employee from performing the employee's supervisory duties, and Mr. Prunty did not act on the employee's concerns when raised.

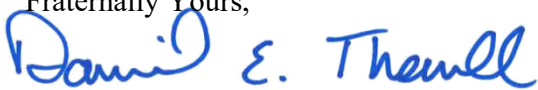
- d. In 2022, an accounting clerk left due to the toxic work environment created by Ms. Owens.
- e. In 2024, an account clerk, upon the employee's retirement after nearly two decades with the City, wrote a letter to the Mayor describing the hostile work environment the employee experienced under Ms. Owens throughout the employee's tenure.
- f. In 2023, a long-time police officer was unlawfully terminated. An arbitrator reinstated the officer and the City's insurance carrier ultimately settled a lawsuit for unlawful employment practices. The arbitration revealed that Ms. Owens inappropriately interfered with the medical evaluation process and work release for the employee.
- g. In 2024, a permit technician/court clerk left due to a hostile work environment and the sudden removal of pay for extra duties without notice.
- h. In 2025, an accounting clerk left due to the hostile work environment created by Ms. Owens.

One departing employee described leaving City employment as feeling like "escaping a cult."

Second, Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens have hindered advancement or growth within the Police Department, which would result in greater police services for the community. This has caused extremely low retention rates, failure to attract qualified candidates to work for the Eagle Point Police Department and burn out among officers.

For these reasons, the Eagle Point Police Officer's Association has lost confidence in the leadership of Aaron Prunty and Melissa Owens. Chief Hamilton's resignation is not the beginning of a problem; it is the latest and most visible consequence of a pattern that has cost this City experienced, capable employees for years. We are asking the Mayor and City Council to take the concerns outlined in this letter seriously and to exercise the Council's authority over these at-will positions to address the leadership of Mr. Prunty and Ms. Owens.

Fraternally Yours,



Daniel E. Thenell

Oregon State FOP Labor Coalition on behalf of the Eagle Point Police Officer's Association