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City writes Sheriff Bradshaw to rat out PBSO Deputy McCray

by Andrew Abramson

Palm Beach County Sheriff's Deputy William McCray has long been the thorn in West Palm Beach's side. And now, a decade after McCray was fired from the West Palm Beach Police Department, the city appears to be gunning after McCray's job at PBSO.

On June 21, West Palm Beach City Administrator Ed Mitchell sent a letter to Sheriff Ric Bradshaw, informing Bradshaw that McCray attended the court hearing of fired West Palm Beach firefighter Rick Curtis (vs. City of West Palm Beach) in his sheriff's uniform. Mitchell said in the letter that it was reported to him by various city employees attending the hearing.

Bradshaw was West Palm Beach's police chief when McCray was fired there. Mitchell still referred to the sheriff as "Chief Ric Bradshaw" in the June 21 letter.

"Deputy McCray was not a witness in the hearing," Mitchell wrote to Bradshaw. "I am bringing this to your attention because Deputy McCray was observed in his sheriff's office uniform as opposed to plain clothes."

On Friday, nearly two months after Mitchell wrote to Bradshaw, PBSO officials sent McCray a letter saying that he is not allowed to wear his PBSO uniform, identify himself as a PBSO deputy or use his PBSO vehicle "if you are conducting personal business related to the city of West Palm Beach or any other political matter, not related to PBSO business."

McCray did not comment, but McCray's labor attorney, Sid Garica, blasted Mitchell for writing to Bradshaw. Garcia said McCray went to the courthouse in his uniform after finishing a shift.

"That's pretty outrageous that Ed Mitchell would, on taxpayer time, take the time to try to interfere with Mr. McCray's employment," Garcia said. "The guy was attending a public hearing and he took the time off to attend the hearing, just like anybody else can attend a public hearing."

McCray won a racial discrimination suit against the city in 2005. The city was ordered to pay \$230,000 at the time, but a court earlier this year threw out the monetary award because of a jury error. A new trial will be held on the damages.

In June, McCray filed a lawsuit against Mitchell, former Mayor Lois Frankel, current Mayor Jeri Muoio, City Attorney Claudia McKenna, Commissioner Keith James and the estate of former Commissioner Bill Moss for civil rights violations.

"I think it's just another indication of the low regard the city, mayor and city administrator have for Mr. McCray's first amendment rights," Garcia said. "They cannot stand someone showing a little independence and backbone. I can't imagine why Mr. Mitchell would try to get McCray fired from a job just for attending a public hearing."

Mitchell did not return a call for comment although a city spokesman said an e-mail that "it wouldn't be appropriate to second guess what PBSO might be doing with the information we sent them."

Garcia said he believes PBSO only followed up on Mitchell's letter because of Mitchell's relationship with Bradshaw.

"Mitchell's letter even called Bradshaw 'chief,'" Garcia said. "Mr. McCray was off duty, he was there because of Mr. Curtis, who was treated very shabbily by the city as well. Mr. McCray was not making a nuisance of himself at the court hearing. He was observing and watching the hearing like anyone else is able to."

Garcia said he doesn't plan to take any legal action against PBSO or the city based on Mitchell's letter, but he said, "I think it could become part of the evidence in Mr. McCray's pending claim under first amendment."

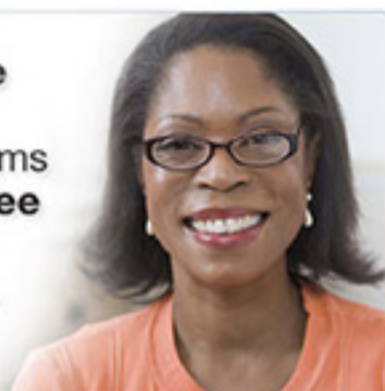
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