

TO: Augusta-Richmond County Commissioners

FROM: James R. Kelly
Former EMS Chief for Augusta Fire Department

DATE: 07 September 2020

SUBJECT: Exit Review of Departmental Leadership w/Augusta Fire Department

As a now former employee of the Augusta Fire Department, I am wanting to inform you all of the leadership that is being curtail at the fire department. My name is James Kelly, I am a 30-year old African-American male who is writing to highlight two-years of inequality, discrimination and hostile workplace atmosphere while all contradicting the mission statement that was not created by the department head, yet a guiding light that is set by the county. A statement that each leader within the infrastructure of the city should uphold. Yet, it did not happen for two-years within the department where I was employed.

In recapping, I am a former employee of both Gold Cross EMS and most recently before Augusta Fire, Department of Defense (Fort Gordon). While working at Fort Gordon, I applied for a part-time paramedic position with the Augusta Fire Department as the department decide to transition into transporting and ordering more ambulances. Upon interviewing for the position in 2018, I was asked if I wanted to apply for the position as the EMS coordinator by the former training chief. Though I was very hesitant in leaving the federal to come to a county that could be unstable. I decided to make the move thinking it would be great in the way that I could really make a difference.

Prior to accepting the job of the EMS Coordinator on June 2, 2018, I noted there were things that were not to par that were needed immediately prior to starting. So, taking the initiative I started reporting to the fire administration building two-weeks prior to the start of June 2, 2018 to work on items such a new medical protocol book that was needed and few other things to get things going. Upon starting, I notice that it was very difficult to get simple task approved such as a requisitions without a hassle. I was then informed by my former boss (Edward Hawthorne) that "He may try and treat you different because he told that if he knew of your lifestyle, he would have never hired you." Something that I never personally disclosed to the Fire Chief, nor did it have any merit on my credentials nor my work ethic.

In being the EMS Coordinator being responsible for medical training, policies (that were signed by the chief), fire/medical apparatus medical compliance. I was never was allowed to sit on the weekly Monday staff meetings until after Deputy Chief Taylor and Attorney Smitherman both departed the organization due retirement and resignation. This was something that I never understood and frustrated me greatly, because I had a Deputy Chief of Technical Services who was my boss that had no ideation as to what I was doing nor was he qualified to do most of my duties that I took care of. No fault to him, he is a great individual, but this was yet another control tactic that was put in place by the fire chief to keep me suppressed.

April 2019, I lost my father due to suicide. I was informed by the fire chief that I was going to be promoted prior to my father's incident occurring. On April 5, 2019, the day of my father's funeral, I was asked if I could come and sign my job description (working title change/no pay increase) on the day of the funeral. I prepared myself in civilian clothes and reported to the fire administration building in Chief James small conference room with Attorney Smitherman and himself. I was asked a few questions as the fire chief was holding the "new" job description. Attorney Smitherman pointed out to the fire chief that I had a some hair that was on my chin that clearly I did not shave before coming. Therefore, he could not "promote" me on that day. I understood that there is a grooming policy that I never veered away from, however I had been off a few days due to my father's death and came on the day of the funeral only to be humiliated by both the fire chief and the staff attorney. Upon returning back to work, I received a letter of warning for not shaving. All of what I thought was insane as I was not on-duty at the time and came on my off-day and the day of my father's burial.

I was placed in a cubicle for a year upon reporting due to not having enough office spaces available, that was understandable. Shortly after Training Chief Hawthorne resigning, I began to ask if I could take the office space as I had patient and employee information that was laying around in my cubicle workspace other individuals could walk and take at any given point. Over a course of a year, I asked if I had earned the right to take a vacant office. At one given point, the comment was made to me in the cubicle area that, "I want things when I want them." I never understood that. For a year, I had to do the following duties all alone at 58K prior to \$5,200 paramedic stipend: Infection Control, Program Director for the EMT programs (Develop curriculum/teach), DPH Office of EMS and Trauma Compliance paperwork (All fire and medical apparatus), DEA management of narcotic logs in conjunction with the medical director), medical logistics (purchasing, stocking and delivering, and EMS Billing (QA reports for errors). These were all things in which I had to do alone in which I maintained 7-days a week because the work always went home with me to keep up with load. I asked for an assistant during this same timeframe, not receiving any help until 2020 which was Lt. Katlynn Matthai.

Prior to Lt. Matthai starting with me, I had asked to take on another program under my belt that would assist our firefighters from having to spend \$1800 out of pocket at Augusta University. A program that myself and Lt. Matthai are both credentialed to teach. This would place a higher level of care to the communities in which we serve with firefighters being on the

fire apparatus, also it would give them one of the keys to success in being eligible to run for promotion. This was something that I wanted to do help strengthen our department medically. For over 6-months I had asked for this program and was told, "No because they would be using it at their part-time jobs." I could not see it from Chief James point-of-view, it was of my belief that we are investing in our firefighters to strengthen the system in which we are part of and service.

In the later part of July 2020, I asked Chief James had I earned a raise as I had been doing a lot of extra task well and moving the department forward on things. In his office, he frowned his faced and went to elaborate, "That you understand that you came in at the top right off the street where most people had to climb to get here. So, you need to go het ARFF, HAZMAT TECH, GSAR and that stuff first, then in about 10-years or so I can introduce to the people in the community to start getting your face known." Well, what I could not understand was that the firefighters working in the company don't get extra compensation for those certifications, so why would that have any merit on a specialized individual. The current training chief, sitting equal on the organizational chart that the fire chief makes \$70k, all I wanted was to be treated equally. Taking into account my track for the past two years to include, but are not limited to the following:

- Revamped the medical protocols (twice)
- Aided in changing medications that are first in the area (TXA) w/Dr. Abell, MD
- Liaison for employees and citizens in COVID testing in collaboration with AU Medical Center
- Changed all AEDs to the leading-edge that will cardiovert automatically at BLS Level
- Effectively managed all GA DPH Licensure Compliance Licensure w/o lapse
- Managed all EMS programs with an overall 85% passing rate
- DEA-Controlled Substance tracking/maintenance w/zero incidence to the county or medical director
- Started a new Advanced EMT Program 2020 in house to assist firefighters with promotion and a higher level of care to the communities in which are serviced.
- Managed EMS billing in conjunction with EMSBilling and Mrs. Dugar with a net collection over \$1 million in just over a year
- Scribed 90% of the medical policies in which are in effect for medical operations
- Working 7-days a week performing COVID testing on-call (No Overtime or Comp. Time)
- Respond to 911 calls when ALS intercept was needed per policy

Three-weeks ago, I asked the fire chief if he could reclassify some of the part-time pcn's in getting me another person to train individuals in the company medically monthly to aid in the reduction of malpractice errors. He then informed me on the Monday afternoon staff meeting that he had to see what was in it for him. He needed me to get some people to go on the ambulance. I informed him on many accords that the best position is for those ambulances to

be manned and supervised by strictly ems personnel and not fire personnel. Individuals do not need to switch back and forth. That was not performed in its totality.

I recently put in a two-weeks' notice on August 28, 2020 to resign due to reasons above in its totality. More so, Chief James reached out to the HR Director, the compensation manager, Mrs. Patmon, Mrs. Smitherman and me that same day to give the EMS Sgts and Lieutenant's pay increase that would place them making more than me and my training lieutenant. This is something that caused a great deal of frustration as he informed me in the kitchen the day prior with Capt. Perkins and Deputy Chief Williams that if this passed, he would give me a pay increase. That never came to fruition unfortunately. On Thursday, September 3, 2020 Chief James informed Lt. K. Matthai to let me know he wanted me off the Advanced EMT class that I established and all programs, switching them to Lt. Matthai. I had asked to use two-weeks of my vacation time in-conjunction with aiding someone new in getting acclimated to the new position. On Friday, September 4, 2020 I called Deputy Chief Williams to inform is that I would be bringing my items to the office. He advised me that Chief James did not want that. He would have to meet me somewhere. He also requested my mailing address as Chief James and Mrs. Smitherman would be sending me a letter advising that my resignation would be effective immediately.

I am rather frustrated with the whole process and how this has transpired. For the two-years that I was there working hard and making positive moves for the department there was no issues though I was being treated unjust and discriminated on many grounds because of my lifestyle choice. Who I am as an individual and the life I choose to live has nothing to do the with fire chief and did not interfere with my performance. I am comfortable with who I am as an individual and do not feel as it is his place to treat me unfair because of your personal belief. I have been nothing but great to serve the department and to protect the fire chief from any all things that came before my desk. I do not hate anyone, however, this behavior is unprofessional and violates many legal grounds.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.