

In City Council Packet



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

TEL 349-4300
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EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

September 22, 1998

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

Statement of City Manager Robert W. Healy

The complaints filed by three minority women within the City are, of course, very troubling to me and to other City officials. Being called a racist, or being accused of discriminatory action is very painful. It is also disturbing that these individuals ended up being so upset with their work and/or their personal circumstances to decide to pursue this action. At a time when the City has made a very significant commitment to developing a system-wide diversity initiative, complaints like these highlight how difficult these challenges are.

Nonetheless, these three claims are without merit. In addition, they are totally unrelated to one another. They involve different departments, different supervisors and much different fact patterns. There is no pattern of discrimination.

Two of the claims were filed some months ago. The third was filed last week. In two of the cases, there has been absolutely no adverse action taken against the employee. One case involves an individual whose department head has recommended her termination. I have reached no final decision on this recommendation, pending the employee's exercising an opportunity to be heard, which she has not yet chosen to do.

The City has filed detailed responses to two of the complaints with the appropriate agency. We will file a response on the third shortly.

Unfortunately, in this day and age, it is not uncommon for individuals to file discrimination claims against employers, including public agencies like the City. Over the years Cambridge, like all large employers, has been subject to its share of employment discrimination complaints from persons in many protected classes, alleging a variety of violations. Similarly, we have also had our share of "reverse discrimination" complaints from white males alleging preferential treatment of persons of color. I want to make it clear to all residents of our community that, in no instance during my administration has the City ever been found by any agency or court to have discriminated against anyone. We are confident that there will be no finding of discrimination in these cases as well.

Although the City would obviously prefer that no employee would ever be motivated to file a complaint about their working conditions, it is inevitable that, in a large, complex organization like the City there will be problems. We employ over 2000 individuals, from many diverse backgrounds and cultures. While not addressing the specifics of these three complaints, it is clear the potential for problems is great. Conflicts will inevitably arise between staff and supervisors or co-workers. Persons will be hired into jobs for which they turn out to be ill suited. Personal problems will arise that interfere with performance. One individual will lose out by the promotion of someone else. Misperceptions and miscommunications will occur, and numerous other circumstances will arise that lead to disharmony. The City struggles to maintain harmony in the workforce, to ensure that all employees are treated fairly, and to manage the conflicts that do arise. This is essential, to keep such conflicts from causing an irreparable breach and to prevent them from interfering with performance of our central mission, to serve the public.

In the supervision of our employees, we have defined uniform standards of conduct and procedure. Occasionally this requires us to take corrective action when performance expectations are not met. In those cases we attempt, whenever possible, to work with the employee to improve performance to an acceptable level. If improvement is not forthcoming we attempt to work with the employee for an amicable resolution of the

matter. If that is not successful, disciplinary action may be required. Such standards and procedures are followed without respect to any non-job-related factors, including race, color, sex, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, disability status and other personal characteristics.

Recognizing that, to best serve the public, we need a workforce representative of the public we serve, the City has been committed to affirmative action, promoting a multicultural workforce, and valuing diversity among our employees for many years. We have one of the most diverse and representative workforces within the Commonwealth. Managing and maximizing the benefits of this diversity is a fundamental challenge to us, as it is to any employer that makes a serious commitment to a multicultural workforce.

Last year we required our department heads and other senior managers to attend 16 hours of diversity training, to help us appreciate and value our differences, and to appreciate the obstacles faced by persons of color, women, gays and lesbians, and others from cultures that have been subordinate to the dominant white male culture. This effort led to the creation of a Diversity Task Force, which has been working in three main areas: employment recruiting, hiring, promotion and retention; organizational development; and training and employee development. As a result of these efforts we recently began what is surely one of the most ambitious diversity training agendas ever launched in the Commonwealth—to train all of our employees in base line diversity issues, in small classes that are diverse themselves, and to include a mix of employees from all departments of the City. Grappling with these issues is very hard work, and in some ways the filing of the complaints demonstrates how hard it is. That is all the more reason why it is essential that we go forward.

Our record on affirmative action is excellent, with some continuing problems that are recognizable by any employer. The overall percentage of persons of color in our

workforce (25%) closely matches that of the workforce within the city (24.7%), and far exceeds that of the Greater Boston area (13.9%), which is our natural labor market.

Our success in hiring and retaining a diverse workforce has been achieved despite the constraints of a civil service system and a highly unionized labor force that many employers do not face. We have managed to build a workforce that, in almost all classifications, is near or exceeds the Goals of our Affirmative Action Plan. In this regard I would assert that our record is as good as or better than most other public or private employers in the Commonwealth.

Like most employers, we struggle to attract and retain persons of color for top executive positions. We strive, above all, for excellence. We have tried to be creative. For example, rather than continue with the civil service position of Police Chief, which, because of the rigidity of the civil service system, drastically narrowed our choice of candidates (and offered little opportunity for persons of color in the near term), we went in a radically different direction. We established the non-civil service position of Police Commissioner, then recruited nationally, until we had a highly qualified, diverse and representative pool of applicants. From these pools we have been able to select the best. Thus, we have been able to hire into this position highly qualified police commanders from Miami and Chicago, to lead one of the most important agencies of municipal government. This is unprecedented in the Commonwealth.

We have tried to be creative in filling other positions as well. For example, for many positions we have sought out candidates who, if they do not have extensive experience in a particular field, have transferable skills that will serve them well in positions that we have vacant.

Although we have not made as much progress at the senior management level as I would like, I have structured my weekly staff meetings to ensure that I receive advice and input from a diverse group of senior managers and staff.

Progress in the area of senior management recruitment, like other areas, is dependent on many factors, including the rate of turnover in positions, the competition with other employers, and the availability of applicants within the workforce. It is also dependent upon the commitment of the employer. And in that we have never been wanting.

Developing, maintaining, and managing a diverse workforce is a process. It is a journey we travel together as we try to learn from each other. The City of Cambridge does not have all the answers. We are not a perfect employer, yet we strive always to do the best we can, for our extraordinary, diverse community, with an exceptional, motivated and diverse group of City employees.



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Statement of City Manager Robert W.
Healy regarding the complaints filed
by three minority women within the City.

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September 28, 1998