



PRESS RELEASE

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Chambers Wins Appeal Over Removal as U.S. Park Police Chief

Main Charge Against Chief Chambers Thrown Out as Protected Whistle Blowing

Washington, DC — The legal saga of former U.S. Park Police Chief Teresa Chambers took yet another turn, as the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit today upheld her status as a whistleblower and threw out the main charge used to justify her removal in 2004. This is the second time this appellate court has ruled in her favor and her case is now remanded back to see if any of the lesser charges remaining justify disciplinary action against her.

Chambers, who had been the police chief in Durham, NC, was selected by the Bush administration following a nationwide search in 2002 as the first female leader of the oldest uniformed police force in federal service. In late 2003, Chief Chambers gave an interview to the Washington Post in which she confirmed dangerously low staffing levels. Three days after her interview was published, she was ordered to surrender her gun and badge, placed on administrative leave, and ordered not to speak any further with the media. After leaving her on administrative leave for 7 months, the Interior Department acted to terminate her, citing her interview as disclosing “law enforcement sensitive” information.

Today’s ruling confirmed that some of her statements about security and staffing concerns were protected under the federal Whistleblower Protection Act and that the underlying charge could not stand. The ruling has implications for scores of other security-related whistleblowers in agencies such as Homeland Security and the Defense Department.

The court declined to overturn three other charges (another two had previously been thrown out) and sent the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board, the civil service review panel, to decide if her removal is still justified. Two of the three remaining charges involve issues that Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (or PEER, which has represented Chief Chambers for the past 6 years) contends are rebutted by her official performance evaluation which was illegally destroyed by the National Park Service. That issue is now the subject of another pending appeal, before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit.

“The Interior Department threw a kitchen sink of bogus charges against Chief Chambers and one by one they are falling away,” stated PEER Senior Counsel Paula Dinerstein, who argued Chambers’ winning appeal. “This ruling will help keep us safer as a nation by creating a legal shield enabling other Paul Reveres to alert the public to hidden dangers.”

Thus far, the Obama administration had argued the same positions put forward by the Bush officials who went after Chief Chambers. Even though some prominent Obama officials had cited the Chambers case as the epitome of excess information suppression during the Bush years, thus far there has been no change in posture or policy either with respect to this case or the broader question of when and how security problems can be ventilated.

“The Obama administration cannot plausibly promise to run an open government and then turn around to punish public servants when they honestly raise concerns,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, noting that Chief Chambers is called the “Honest Chief”. “We wish the Obama administration would stop prosecuting whistleblowers and would instead welcome them back to public service.”