



Tell-a-Friend

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Protecting Employees Who Protect Our Environment



News Releases

For Immediate Release: March 10, 2005

Contact: Jeff Ruch (202) 265-7337

MISSING DOCUMENTS IN CHAMBERS CASE SUDDENLY FOUND — Interior Still Deciding Whether to Release Newly Located Records

Washington, DC — Under the pressure of a federal lawsuit, the Department of Interior has reversed itself and announced that the documents sought by Teresa Chambers do in fact exist and have not been destroyed, according to a letter released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). Two weeks ago, Teresa Chambers filed suit in federal district court after the Interior Department said it no longer had the documents which show charges used as the basis to remove her as Chief of the U.S. Park Police last year were trumped up.

The key document being sought is a performance evaluation of Chambers prepared by Deputy Park Service Director Donald Murphy, who later charged Chambers with misconduct relating to breaches of chain-of-command and other performance-related issues. According to Murphy's sworn testimony in depositions taken prior to Chambers' first hearing seeking reinstatement, his evaluation covered the periods during which her supposed misconduct occurred but his evaluation did not mention the issues or incidents that were later used as a partial basis for her firing last July.

"This latest about-face is just another illustration of duplicitous behavior by top Interior officials bent on removing Chief Chambers come hell or high water," stated PEER General Counsel Richard Condit, who filed the suit on Chambers' behalf. "Chief Chambers should not have to go to federal court to get something that is supposed to be in her personnel file."

While the Interior Department now admits that the document exists, it is still deciding whether or when to release it. Chambers is suing under the Privacy Act which entitles individuals to see records about them maintained by federal agencies, particularly records created as part of a federal employee's personnel file. Chambers is suing the Interior Department because it is the parent agency of the National Park Service.

At the same time in a different forum, Teresa Chambers is also seeking reinstatement. Her appeal is now before the U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board. Two of the six administrative charges that the Interior Department had leveled against Chief Chambers were thrown out at the trial level. If produced, Murphy's evaluation could knock out two of the remaining four charges. The remaining two charges involve an interview Chief Chambers gave to The Washington Post, and those charges will also be subject to First Amendment and other separate federal court challenges if they are upheld at this stage.

“Now that they have found the documents that Chief Chambers has a right to see by law, what is Interior waiting for?” Condit asked, noting that Chief Chambers was stripped of her badge, credentials and side arm and marched out of Interior headquarters under armed escort on December 5, 2003. “Teresa Chambers’ case is about whether a public servant can be fired for telling the truth but it is apparent that there is no sanction in the Interior Department for avoiding the truth.”

###