



News Releases

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TERESA CHAMBERS FINALLY TESTIFIES BEFORE CONGRESS — Long Ordeal of “Honest Chief” Underscores Need to Reform Whistleblower Laws

Washington, DC — Teresa Chambers, the U.S. Park Police Chief removed by the Bush administration for speaking out about security gaps on the Capitol’s monuments, parks and parkways, today speaks before Congress. Her case frames the question of whether honesty is a firing offense in federal service, according to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER) which posted her testimony.

Chief Chambers, now the Chief of Police for the Town of Riverdale Park, Maryland, makes her very first congressional appearance about her case before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. The committee is considering whistleblower reform legislation that has Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) as its lead author. This hearing will also help determine if the Obama administration will support whistleblower reforms opposed by the Bush administration.

The Chambers case has been a more than five-year legal odyssey following her suspension and eventual removal for an interview she gave to The Washington Post in which she confirmed information provided by the police union that added post-9/11 patrols on the National Mall were stripping other posts of needed officers. In her testimony, Chief Chambers stated “I am Exhibit A in the case for reform” and urged changes that ensure –

- Fast and fair handling of cases, including jury trials for cases not resolved early. “If I had the opportunity to take my case to a jury of my peers, I would not be here before you today,” she observed;
- Clear rules without hyper-technical exceptions, so that agencies cannot concoct after-the-fact reasons for taking punitive action against unwelcome candor; and
- Attention to fixing the underlying problems which whistleblowers risked their careers to raise.

“In my case, I told Congress and top agency officials and ultimately confirmed to the media that the United States Park Police was dangerously understaffed,” Chambers testified. “It is still understaffed, even more so today...Officers are not getting the

support they need to do a demanding but vital job; and, because of this, both they and the public remain in danger.”

Chambers’ case is now back before the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit which ruled in 2008 that the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) had improperly upheld her removal, holding that Chief Chambers was removed “in reprisal for making a protected disclosure”. On remand, the two remaining holdover Republican members of the MSPB again sustained her removal, setting up the current appeal.

“Besides legislative changes, the Obama administration must decide if they are going to continue defending the personnel purges of the Bush era – and Teresa Chambers is at the top of that list,” said PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, whose organization provides legal representation for Chief Chambers. “It is time to bring the political exiles home.”