



Tell-a-Friend

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Protecting Employees Who Protect Our Environment



News Releases

For Immediate Release: February 14, 2008

Contact: Jeff Ruch (202) 265-7337

TERESA CHAMBERS WINS APPEAL FOR PARK POLICE CHIEF JOB — Federal Court Holds Risk to Public Safety Is Protected by Whistleblower Act

Washington, DC — The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit today upheld the challenge of Teresa Chambers to her removal as Chief of the U.S. Park Police, according to a ruling released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). The appeals court sent her case back to a federal civil service board to correct its failure to recognize that Chief Chambers was removed “in reprisal for making a protected disclosure” under the Whistleblower Protection Act.

The appeals court ruling affirmed that police and other public servants are legally protected when raising warnings about “a risk to public safety.” This decision will also have broad application beyond Chief Chambers to personnel within Homeland Security and related agencies who report security breakdowns.

The U.S. Interior Department removed Chief Chambers from her post overseeing the U.S. Park Police after she confirmed serious staffing shortages in an interview with the Washington Post. The substance of Chief Chambers’ concerns was validated earlier this month in a report by the Interior Office of Inspector General which found that the U.S. Park Police is still plagued by inadequate force levels and funding.

“This is a great victory for Chief Chambers,” stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch, whose organization represented Chambers in her long legal fight. “Now is the time for the Interior Department to bring Chief Chambers back to solve the problems she risked her job to raise.”

The 2-1 decision by the Federal Circuit panel remands the case back to the Merit Systems Protection Board to correct the Board’s error for failing to recognize that Chief Chambers had a right under the Whistleblower Protection Act to make “disclosures of a danger to public safety.” While upholding her whistleblower defense, the Federal Circuit Appeals Court did not act on a host of other procedural and substantive challenges to the administrative action against Chief Chambers.

If the Board follows the instructions given to it by the Appeals Court, it should find that the removal of Chief Chambers was illegal and restore her to her previous position. The Board, however, has been slow to act in this case, holding Chief Chambers’ appeal more than 500 days before it finally made the ruling that the appeals court overturned. Chief Chambers currently heads the police department for Riverdale Park, a town in Prince George's County, Maryland

“Chief Chambers should never have been dismissed,” Ruch added, noting that Chief Chambers was stripped of her badge and gun in December 2003 and was left in limbo on paid administrative leave until July 2004. “Teresa Chambers should not have to wait any more months for justice. Taxpayers have already wasted enough money going after a conscientious public servant for simply telling the truth.”

All of the Interior Department and National Park Service appointees who were involved in the suspension and removal of Chambers have since either resigned, been reassigned, or, in the case of then Deputy Interior Secretary Steven Griles, imprisoned for lying to Congress.

###