

## Ex-Park Police chief could get old job back

By [Ed O'Keefe](#)

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Teresa C. Chambers, the former U.S. Park Police chief who was removed in 2003 for voicing concerns about staffing shortages, could be back on the job next month after federal officials ordered her reinstatement Tuesday citing a lack of evidence.

Chambers was suspended and later fired after [telling The Washington Post in December 2003](#) that traffic accidents had increased along the Baltimore-Washington Parkway because two, rather than the recommended four, officers were on patrol. The police agency also lacked enough officers to protect U.S. parkland, Chambers said at the time, adding that unarmed guards would protect some national monuments.

Citing weak evidence against her, the Merit Systems Protection Board ordered the Park Police Tuesday to reinstate Chambers within 20 days. She is also entitled to retroactive pay starting from July 2004, as well as the reimbursement for legal fees.

The decision caps almost eight years of legal efforts by Chambers, who currently serves as Riverdale's police chief. She was stunned by the decision, she said Tuesday.

"The goal from the start was to return to the job that I loved, the job I competed for and was hired for, and to make sure justice prevailed, not just for me," Chambers said in an interview. "This is precedent-setting for other civil servants, other federal employees. One of the questions has been can a federal employee be fired for telling the truth, and this case will lay the groundwork for the future."

The Bush administration had removed her on the basis of six charges, two of which were later dismissed by an administrative judge. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit dismissed another charge last April and the MSPB dismissed the others Tuesday.

Her lawyer, Paula Dinerstein of the advocacy group Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, called the decision "a wonderful ruling, not only for Chief Chambers but for thousands who believe that honesty is part of public service."

The National Park Service, which oversees the Park Police, is reviewing the ruling and had no comment Tuesday, according to spokesman David Barna.

Salvatore Lauro has served as Park Police chief since January 2009. He could not be reached for comment Tuesday night. By law, Lauro would have to step down to make room for Chambers, according to her lawyers.

MSPB is an independent [three-member panel](#) that hears appeals from federal employees seeking reinstatement. Two of the board's three members, Susan Tsui Grundmann and Anne M. Wagner, were appointed by President Obama; Mary M. Rose was appointed by George W. Bush.

About 1 percent of appeals result in reinstatement, according to agency figures from 2008.

Chambers said she was puzzled and disappointed by the Obama administration's decision to continue the legal battle, having expected it would drop the case.

"But everything happens for a reason," she said. "A compromise, or the executive branch stepping in and fixing this wouldn't have had the long-reaching positive impact of a court decision, in this case several court decisions and a Merit Systems Protection Board decision. That's going to be more positive for the greater good."

*Staff writer Mary Pat Flaherty contributed to this report.*