

# **Committee on Libraries, Parks and Recreation**

Submitted by:

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Good morning Chairman Thomas, committee members, Messrs. Neil Rodgers and James Pittman.

I am Deborrah Jackson, President of the American Federation of Government Employees, Local 2741, DC Department of Parks and Recreation.

With an upsurge in homicides, spousal and child abuse, due largely to the downturn in our economy, disposal income has all but disappeared. The yearly trips to King's Dominion, Six Flags and Disney World are no more. The dollars must go for the rising cost of food, clothing, utilities and fuel. It makes no sense that we should be at this hearing fighting to save an agency, which has been at the forefront of the Washington, DC community for at least one hundred years. Moreover, we have served the residents regardless of color or creed; from cradle to grave.

This agency of last resort has educated two year olds, provided mentoring and uplift to our children and youths, crafts and dance to our middle agers, and fellowship and companionship to our Seniors. All of this goodness built by many

hands, minds and hearts over this last century is about to be passé. Those who have gone on to their just rewards are rolling in their graves. Others that are still with us are heartsick over the recent developments.

At the December 15, 2008, hearing, before this committee, the Union voiced its concerns about the systematic efforts in place to dismantle DPR's recreational component. To date, the Fenty Administration's efforts to realize their goal have escalated dramatically.

The Comp 1 & 2 Negotiated Agreement with the City to convert temps <sup>and</sup> ~~to~~ terms has been breached. The life of the contract is from 2006 to 2010. DC Human Resources, formerly the DC Office of Personnel has unilaterally suspended processing employees who were eligible under the contract. DCHR contends that the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the previous City Administrator, Robert Bobb, under the Williams' Administration is no longer valid. The City should expect filings by the Union in Comp 1 & 2 regarding this matter.

A question was asked at the December 22<sup>nd</sup> hearing to Director Ray, "Why so many term positions existed in the agency?" The answer is quite simple: Mr. Ray doesn't feel that the line staff is neither qualified nor deserving of upward mobility. Case in point: A career electrician in an RW-10 position chose not to apply for a vacancy posted as an electrician, RW-11 because it was advertised as a term appointment. (Because he didn't apply for this position his continued employment is being threatened and he is expected to now obtain licensure for a position that didn't require any at the time he was hired for it.) Ms. Richelle Marshall, Chief Administrative Officer/HR Advisor, stated that it would be unfair to have new individuals come in over existing career staff and that the job would remain term for four years. The Union's response to this laughable notion was that the career employee would, no doubt, appreciate the certification bearing his name on the best qualified list. He at least would have an interview and be afforded the opportunity to compete with others of his ilk. From January 2008 to December 2008, twenty-eight (28) vacancy announcements were posted of which several had to be reissued. Only eight (8) were frontline career positions. Apparently, career positions will no longer exist in the agency, only term appointments.

Individuals in term positions are still being separated from DPR while upper management positions are being filled. How do you justify DS and/or MSS grades 12 through 14 if the underpinning grades 5, 7, 9 and 11 are not in place? Help us understand the rationale because we got no coherent response from Ms.

Marshall.

This January, twenty-five (25) employees were separated from the Office of Educational Services. It was understood in the OES hearing on December 3, 2008, that Director Clark Ray stated to this committee that individuals would be offered other positions within the agency. Only one individual was offered a position in the coping room. Union questioned the validity that the remaining twenty-four (24) were not qualified. The HR Advisor finally confessed that funding was not available to absorb them.

To eliminate OES and send the 3 and 4 year olds to DCPS will prove to be an unwise choice. Some parents want their children to thrive in a less restrictive setting. There will be plenty of time for rigorous, structured training once they enter first grade. Besides, Michelle Rhee has not demonstrated she can improve



the upper grades. Director Ray has admitted that he never thought OES should have been in the agency; that it should be over in education, that is in DCPS.

The Cooperative Play Program cannot be the cure-all for our pre-school aged children. There is no license required to operate facilities. No curriculum designed to have children learn colors, shapes, counting and alphabets. Play is the central theme for these children. This program was reduced considerably once day care and head-start emerged. None exist within Wards 1, 5, 6, 7, and 9. Presently, there are nine. Only two (2) east of Rock Creek Park, Kennedy in Ward 2; Emery in Ward 4. The remainder is west of the Park. Our young parents who attend school and are working will not be able to take advantage of this program because there is a mandatory requirement that parents serve weekly to assist staff.

Drug testing is still an issue. Since Phil Mendelson, Chair of the Judiciary Committee, is a member of this committee, he should be asked to begin the task of addressing the procedural flaws existing in the testing of employees and in the clean-up of the drug testing legislation that is in effect.

The Department of Recreation was created by Congress. We were originally under the Interior Department's National Park Service. The department, now known as Parks and Recreation, has remained the guardian of the land for many decades only for the specific purpose of providing recreation. Our properties sit on prime land. Economic developers as well as others have salivated for years on how to wrestle it away from the residents.

But today they have found a way through the Fenty Administration's well conceived and concealed plot to chip at the service offerings of DPR until it only exists on paper; just enough to keep the Feds off their backs. Service will be so impaired that the agency will be rendered useless. The Mayor then can complain that some buildings are surplus and eyesores in the community. Developers will be found to erect more architectural monstrosities that have ruined our majestic skyline. Others will be turned into private gyms, health spas and the like thereby commanding \$2,000.00 to \$3,000.00 dollars annual membership.

Contracting out seems to be the method of choice to rid the city of a necessary evil, the DC worker. The Fenty Administration has consistently demonstrated its disdain for DC workers, be they Union or non-Union.

How ironic is it that Councilmember Adrian Fenty walked and talked his way into neighborhoods throughout the city where these workers lived? Did he mention his contempt for you when he shook your hand, looked you in your eyes and asked for your vote? His strong constituent service record was the vehicle that won over many. This young energetic fresh-face promised as he campaigned to address mismanagement in this government. Yet, in two short years these promises have disappeared. What has emerged instead, an administration devoid of compassion, empathy or understanding the conditions of others.

Mismanagement has been the hallmark of his tenure as mayor. In place of instituting systems and strategies to ameliorate problems, Mr. Fenty's approach to the matter is to dismantle the agencies under his authority. On channels 4 and 5 recently, the mayor has touted a billion dollar reserve and that there is no need to worry because DC is in good shape.



Residents, are your tax dollars enhancing your quality of life that this government promised? Are you able to: access educational opportunities, health care, feel safe and secure in your environment, provide adequate housing and wisely use your leisure time? These basic rights are necessary to remain residents of this city. Apparently Mayor Fenty has become an agent of the business development crowd. He is poised to deliver this city to them by contracting out your services. Look at what is already happening:

- Closing libraries earlier than they currently are
- Contracting out the care of our mentally ill and disabled residents. Has everybody forgotten Forest Haven?
- Government buildings, other than Wilson and Judiciary Square, where you do business have guards that have no authority to run metal detectors
- Issues with the housing trust fund; not enough affordable housing for residents
- Recreation facilities closing their doors due to inadequate staffing levels. Same level of 1-1/2 persons per site that was prevalent in 1999 with an

annual budget of \$29 million. In FY'08 the budget was doubled to approximately \$59 million dollars and we are still at the same staffing level of 1-1/2 persons per site. Is this not mismanagement?

On behalf of all DPR employees, the Union requests an audit be conducted by the DC Auditor's Office. Why have there been no town hall meetings to inform the public of the financial crisis? There is no government-wide hiring freeze, limitations on travel, or educational training.

Last month's telecast of NBC's Meet the Press, where Mayor Fenty was invited to represent inner city Mayors, he could not articulate what President Obama's ascension to the presidency meant to black youths. David Gregory, the moderator, all but used tweezers to extract a response. The Mayor never gave a response to that particular question. Another panelist, Congresswoman Maxine Waters, representative for South Central Los Angeles, stated that she would concentrate on a component within the public schools which would track youths who may need assistance with home life issues. Yet, another missed opportunity. Our mayor did not chime in to inform the gentle lady that one already exists within the District Government and could serve as a model. A program

requirement of staff is to make weekly home visits to see if parents need help in finding jobs, healthcare, clothing, housing, food, etc. This program is the Roving Leaders/Program housed within DPR.

At the last hearing, Mr. Chairman, you inquired about the nine (9) positions put in the budget by this council for FY'09 which have not been filled. It is my understanding that these positions are slated to be contracted out to a group from Chicago, who the Roving Leader Staff are expected to train to do our jobs in the community. Incidentally, the group would be paid no less than \$50,000.00 each to live in DC; more than staff currently working in the agency that cannot get beyond a DS 5 entry level position. Rumors are floating that the Roving Leaders will be removed from the agency. It needs to remain in DPR. It does not belong in MPD, DHS or any other agency. We are youths workers who use recreation as a vehicle to engage youths and change their behavior through it.

On Monday, February 2, 2009, I received a call from Mr. Kimball Barnes, Recreation Specialist assigned to the Aquatics Division, informing me that he found a note on the windshield of his car as he left his worksite, the Therapeutic

Recreation Center, for lunch. The note threatened the lives of staff and patrons.

Maintaining the "G" rating of this telecast, without using the profane words, I will read into the record the note:

"F--- all recreation staff and those old b----- who went to the city council hearing about us.

We will f--- all of you up! Who do you think you are? You are all MF pieces of s---!"

Police were called and the Aquatics Division Chief and his assistant had arrived. Upon my arrival and after assessing the problem, I requested through Mr. Terence Reddick, Labor Liaison, to have a meeting with Director Ray, Positive Nature and the TRC staff immediately. Mr. Ray, nor others in the chain of command responded to the request. I remained in contact with Mr. Reddick to find out if arrangements were being made for the meeting. I was told on Wednesday that an Administrator would be sent. I informed Mr. Reddick that it was imperative that the matter be dealt with by Friday. If no meeting was held, the message to Director Ray was, "Not to bother. The TRC staff was no longer interested in meeting with him."

Positive Nature has made no overtures to staff or our seniors to resolve the matter. Obviously they hold the same attitude as Mr. Ray. The Union's attitude is that since government employees were involved and the incident occurred at a government facility, it's the government's responsibility to ensure the health and safety of its staff and clients. The free ride that has been afforded Positive Nature must be revoked. They have forfeited the right to occupy a District Government facility. Like any landlord, the agency should give proper notification, thirty (30)



days in this case, for them to vacate the premises. The MOA does state that the arrangement with DPR can be nullified forthwith. Staff and seniors have been advised to be aware of their surroundings; if at all possible, to stay in pairs; to inform their family members of this threat, especially those that we classify as the good, the bad and the ugly. Be advised, if any harm comes to either seniors or staff there will be hell to pay!

Shortly, Director Ray will give his testimony. He will no doubt make glowing remarks of how much he appreciates the hard work and dedication of the staff. Such pronouncements are just political slick talk. If asked to give an explanation for not meeting with staff or our seniors whose very lives have been threatened, he will just apologize profusely for his actions. He has never shown genuine respect for DPR staff or the patrons whose taxes pay him a handsome salary.

We need answers to many things that have transpired. Mr. Thomas, let us unravel the mystery today. Swear in the agency's witnesses. Do not let them waltz in here and tell a pack of lies with impunity. If they choose to lie, then let it be under oath. Get to the heart of the matter. Ask what program offerings will be available this summer. What is the plan for programming in FY'10? Are any innovative programs being proposed?

Mr. Thomas, once you were a staunch supporter of Mayor Fenty's platform. For that allegiance he crossed you by proposing to close at least seven (7) Ward 5 schools. If the "Fenty Machine" has its way, you will be the first casualty on the council to lose your Chairmanship. Other council members for sure will follow your demise. Definitely, the handwriting is on the wall.



In conclusion:

It is evident to those that can see the Mayor's elaborate ploy to re-segregate Washington, DC through the new Jim Crow ---economic development. This Council has a responsibility to heed the concerns of their constituents. Do not be a "do nothing" Council. Simply put: So goes the basic quality of life issues for residents; so too goes this DC City Council.

I am prepared to address any questions you may have.