

Michael A. Washington

[REDACTED]

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Mr. Washington:

This letter details the written charges of your removal for cause from the position of Fire Chief in accordance with Article V, Section 6 of the Charter of the City of Cincinnati. You also have the right to be heard before me, City Manager Sheryl Long. As explained more thoroughly below, you are hereby charged with insubordination, unsatisfactory performance, nonfeasance, misfeasance, incompetency, inefficiency, and other failures of good behavior. Most concerning, when I and others have raised these issues to you, you do not accept responsibility and hold yourself accountable. Rather you place blame and responsibility on others. Please see the specifications, below.

CHARGE 1: In November of 2021, my predecessor, Paula Boggs Muething, instructed you to initiate a climate assessment of the Fire Department. The climate assessment was meant to evaluate the workplace culture and give potential recommendations for improving Department morale. This directive was not completed and no explanation for your lack of follow through was given. This inaction and your continued blaming of subordinate staff have created a perception you do not take workplace concerns seriously. Since November 2021, the workplace culture in the Department has worsened, in large part due to your inaction. As a result of worsening workplace concerns, I directed you to engage with Women Helping Women to use their subject-matter expertise to begin to improve the situation, particularly among female firefighters. Their recent report, combined with my own observations, show that you have not effectively addressed the concerns. The Cincinnati Fire Department needs long-term, sustainable workplace culture change, and I no longer have confidence in your ability to implement or oversee such change.

The Classification of Fire Chief indicates that you are the Commanding Officer of the Fire Department. You have the responsibility to organize, direct, and control “all resources of the Fire Department for the most efficient discharge of its duty” and you should have knowledge of “Human Resources Policies and Procedures, Civil Service Rules, union contracts, and Equal Employment Opportunity guidelines.”

Your failing to follow through on the directive to conduct a climate assessment and failing to address concerns that have risen since that directive constitutes insubordination,

incompetency, inefficiency, unsatisfactory performance, a failure of good behavior, and nonfeasance in office.

CHARGE 2: On February 20, 2023, you were unavailable during an apartment fire that injured citizens and employees. When questioned about your unavailability, you responded by blaming subordinate employees, rather than taking responsibility as the head of the Fire Department.

The Classification of Fire Chief indicates that your position “Commands firefighting operations at major fires and/or disasters.”

Your complete and unexcused unavailability during a major fire constitutes unsatisfactory performance and nonfeasance in office.

CHARGE 3: You disobeyed my directive to consult with the HR Director regarding Lieutenant Freeman’s return to duty after he was arrested for allegedly assaulting a woman and obstructing official business. Instead of consulting the HR Director, you contacted me, ignored HR guidance without rational justification, reached an undocumented agreement about Lt. Freeman’s return absent any oversight by me or my designee at the time, exercised poor judgment in reassigning Lt. Freeman, and misrepresented my directives to the people involved. Following these actions, you cited the labor management agreement as the reason for doing so, which is inaccurate and represents an unwillingness to take ownership for your decisions.

The Fire Chief is expected to obey direct orders from the City Manager and accurately relay them.

Your failing to follow the direct order to contact the HR Director and misrepresenting the City Manager’s delegation of authority constitutes insubordination and dishonesty.

CHARGE 4: Your management of the acquisition of a training center for the Fire Department was not effective and required excessive assistance from the City Manager’s Office.

The Classification of Fire Chief indicates that your position “[p]repares and/or oversees the preparation of the operating and capital budgets and maintains fiscal control within budgetary appropriations for activities assigned to the Fire Department” and “Conducts short-range (up to one year) and long-range (more than one year) planning for the Fire Department in order to identify personnel and budget resources to sustain and improve fire operations and programs.”

Your ineffective administration of this plan which required excessive assistance and oversight from the City Manager's Office for preparing and planning resources constitutes incompetency, inefficiency, unsatisfactory performance, and nonfeasance.

CHARGE 5: Your communication with my office and the various directors has not been effective, often requiring micromanagement of lower-level responsibilities that I should be able to entrust to you without oversight.

The Classification of Fire Chief indicates that should have the ability to "Communicate orally and in writing with government officials and citizens."

Accordingly, the inability to communicate effectively as required by the minimum requirements of your classification specification constitutes incompetency, inefficiency, unsatisfactory performance, and nonfeasance.

You are being given the opportunity to be heard upon these written charges this 24th day of March.

Sheryl M.M. Long
City Manager