



Commonwealth of Kentucky

Kentucky Commission on Human Rights

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Press Release

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State Human Rights Commission asks U.S. Justice to investigate allegations of police mistreatment of African Americans in Providence, Ky., expresses concern about mayor's remarks

Louisville (July 1, 2016) – The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights today in a letter to the U.S. Dept. of Justice Western District of Kentucky asked the department to investigate Providence, Ky., citizens' allegations of police mistreatment based on race and color.

“Please be advised that the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights has received verbal and written complaints from citizens of Providence, Ky., regarding alleged racial profiling, harassment and/or mistreatment of residents by certain city police officers,” said John J. Johnson, executive director of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights.

In addition, Executive Director Johnson expressed the commission's grave concern about the Providence mayor's response to the citizens' concerns.

The Journal-Enterprise newspaper reported on June 8 that during a Providence City Council meeting on June 7, Mayor Eddie Gooch admonished a resident for wearing a “Black Lives Matter” tee-shirt into the council chamber. Mayor Gooch told the resident that if she wore the shirt again, she would be escorted out. As reported, Mayor Gooch said, “That [Black Lives Matter] is a racist organization, and a racist sign, and you will not wear it back in these council chambers.”

Further, the paper reported that Mayor Gooch said, “Black lives only matter when they're killed by a white police officer – All lives matter.”

Executive Director Johnson said the mayor's remarks are most troubling to the commission.

“Mayor Gooch's statements belie a profound misunderstanding of the “Black Lives Matter” public awareness concept, which arose in response to a growing number of African Americans who had been killed by police officers. Certainly all lives matter. But if police are unfairly targeting black citizens for abusive treatment, including death, then no lives will be safe,” Johnson said.

The letter signed by Executive Director Johnson said:

“One of the mandates by law to be carried out by the commission is to encourage fair treatment, foster mutual understanding and respect, and discourage discrimination against any racial or ethnic group or its members.

“Any holder of an elected or appointed governmental office such as a mayor shares the grave responsibility to help the state stand by such a mandate for the peace and safeguarding of our society...

“The mayor’s interactions with residents at the city council meeting on June 7 and his statements about “Black Lives Matter” do not instill confidence that the civil and constitutional rights of the residents of Providence will be protected.”

Given the nature and seriousness of the allegations by citizens about police behavior based on race, color or ethnicity, the commission requested the U.S. Department of Justice to “investigate to determine if citizens’ rights have been violated in any way.”

The Kentucky Commission on Human Rights is the state government authority that enforces civil rights laws, which discrimination illegal.

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