

CITY OF COLUMBUS

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September 15, 2017

To the Citizens of Columbus:

There are important points about this week's events involving one of our police officers that I need to make clear.

1. An employee resignation given before a hearing on a disciplinary matter ends the employment of an employee. In other words, once the employee resigns, he cannot be fired.
2. Chief Lewis, against advice of his Assistant Chief, first elected to reprimand Officer Dowd. Obviously I did not know about the matter then, but when I found out about the traffic stop and detention, as Mayor **I felt a reprimand was inadequate**. After I met with Chief Lewis and expressed my concern over the officer's conduct as shown in the video, Chief Lewis said he would recommend a seven day suspension. **I felt that was also inadequate, but it is his recommendation to make**. Earlier this week Chief Lewis gave Officer Dowd notice that the Mayor and Council would consider Chief Lewis' recommendation on September 19th in Executive Session after the Council's regular business at 5:00 pm.
3. On Thursday, the Police Department Overview Committee met and the recommendation was unanimous that Officer Dowd be terminated. Before that, I had issued a directive to Chief Lewis to suspend Officer with pay so that he was off the streets of Columbus pending Tuesday night's meeting.
4. Recall that Officer Canyon Boykin resigned before the Mayor and Council voted to terminate. I felt there was a legitimate legal question about the validity of that vote. As a consequence of that issue, I instructed our attorney to seek advice from the Mississippi Attorney General. The Attorney General has issued an official opinion and advised that once a resignation is effective, any vote to terminate would be null and void.
5. In my opinion, **Officer Dowd brought embarrassment upon the City and the law enforcement community in general and his conduct was bad enough that termination was indicated**. As of yet, we don't have the benefit of his side of the story. However, he has elected not to present a defense to discipline and we now know that he has the right to resign before the Council can act and we are relieved that he has voluntarily ended his employment with the City of Columbus.
6. I have had a number of calls from citizens, suggesting that we fire Officer Dowd rather than let him resign. Given the Attorney General's clear opinion on the subject, I will suggest to the Council that his resignation be accepted and that we don't consider termination. This in no way shows weakness on the City's part. He has resigned and personally, **I am happy he did that**.
7. Please understand that the traffic stop of this young gentleman has received national news coverage. Officer Dowd's voice and inflection was clearly recorded on his body camera and it is readily available in the public domain. I will ensure that the City's report to the Mississippi Department of Public Safety's Office of Standards and Training, will state that Officer

Dowd resigned while a disciplinary matter was pending. Between the national news and our report, a termination is not necessary and is against the advice of our lawyer.

8. If Officer Dowd seeks employment in law enforcement going forward, his next prospective employer will be hard pressed not to know about his August 18, 2017 stop and detention here in Columbus. An internet search will reveal more than enough for anyone to find what happened in Columbus.

9. I am very proud of the men and women in our Police Department. I hope they know that going forward, if they want to resign, there would have to be extraordinary circumstances for us to attempt to refuse in order to fire. If someone wants to resign, there is no reason for firing, as the end result is the same. He or she will no longer be our employee.

10. In closing, 1st Peter tells us in Chapter 3, Verse 9 that we “do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.” 1st Thessalonians, Chapter 5, Verse 15 says “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.” Personally it is my belief that Officer Dowd has done what is good for us and everyone else and we should accept his resignation readily and with gratitude.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Smith, Sr., Mayor