

October 2, 2024

Opa-locka Police Department  
South Florida PBA Chapter  
780 Fisherman Street  
Opa-locka, FL 33054

Steadman Stahl  
President, South Florida PBA  
10680 NW 25th Street  
Doral, FL 33172

Dear Mr. Stahl,

Less than a year ago, Robin Starks began her tenure as the Assistant Chief of the Opa-locka Police Department (OLPD). From the beginning, she subjected several members of the South Florida Police Benevolent Association (PBA) working for the OLPD to discrimination, harassment, and a hostile work environment. She has specifically targeted members of the Criminal Investigations Unit. We believe the purpose of her efforts is to undermine the work of the OLPD in support of her attorney, Michael Pizzi.

With two separate incidents, Assistant Chief Starks took action to denigrate and scrutinize arrests made by officers in the department. In both cases she attempted to have internal affairs investigations opened on arresting officers. In one such case, the arrest of a suspect for attempted murder, she admitted to communicating with the wife of the suspect while knowing that the suspect was being represented by her attorney against the Opa-locka Police Department.

In jailhouse recordings of calls between the suspect and his wife, the wife confirms her communication with Assistant Chief Starks. Subsequently at a hearing to have the case dismissed, Starks' and the suspect's attorney, Michael Pizzi seemed to have had access to sensitive and not yet disclosed police intel on the matter. While Pizzi was unsuccessful at having the case thrown out, he was successful at having the charges reduced from attempted murder to battery. We believe and evidence supports that this was accomplished with the assistance of Assistant Chief Starks.

In another incident that occurred while Starks was attending a seminar outside of the city, she directed the Patrol Captain to report to former Commissioner and current Commission candidate Audrey Dominguez details of a police arrest while it was occurring. The man arrested by OLPD was found in violation of a restraining order obtained by Commission candidate Retevia Bain-Walden, a political opponent of Ms. Dominguez. Assistant Chief Starks further directed the Patrol Captain to investigate the arrest in support of Audrey Dominguez' claims of police brutality and again undermining the OLPD Criminal Investigations Unit. In directing the Patrol Captain to report to a resident and political candidate and investigate the arrest executed on behalf of an opposing political candidate, Assistant Chief Starks sought to influence the outcome of an investigation in favor of one political candidate over another. Such behavior is conduct unbecoming of a sworn officer and damages the credibility of the entire department.

In furtherance of an apparent agenda to attack the criminal investigations unit, create a hostile work environment, and denigrate arrests, Assistant Chief Starks has taken a number of actions:

- Improperly interviewing witness participating in internal affairs cases;
- Improperly taking statements from persons represented by attorneys without informing their legal counsel;
- Confronted the veteran supervisor of the detective unit, Sergeant Corey Krotenberg; and
- Has openly stated that she believes that both Detective Ludwin Vielman and Detective Jose Trigo are untrustworthy and ineffective.

Assistant Chief Starks made these claims despite having never worked with either officer. Like many of us, Detectives Vielman and Trigo are experienced officers dedicated to the service of our community. None of us who willingly serve, deserve to be slandered by a senior officer in such an unprofessional manner.

Her conduct creates severe issues and liability for the City and severely decreases morale in the OLPD. Indeed, the majority of the most experienced and veteran members of us are considering retirement if forced to work under the direction of Assistant Chief Starks.

In following with our PBA contract with the City for Opa-locka, we brought our complaints to the attention of the City Manager, Darvin Williams. As per past practice in matters such as these and as is common policy and procedure, City Manager Williams engaged a neutral third party investigator to review our complaints. Many of us met with the investigator. We informed her that Assistant Chief Starks, upon her hire, immediately began attacking officers and sergeants assigned to the OLPD, those assigned to the Criminal Investigations Unit in particular. Her efforts included attempting to reorganize the unit by pulling detective's assignments, changing schedules, and failing to sign overtime slips.

Most egregiously, prior to a detective position being posted, Assistant Chief Starks made statements that she would be actively working to place Black women in specialized units. Specifically, she stated that the next person to be selected as a detective would be a Black female. At her direction, her statement came to fruition as she selected Officer Huget Dumeus, a Black female, for the position. Afterwards, we learned that Assistant Chief Starks sent Officer Dumeus to detective training and signed her up for other trainings before the selection process for the position began. This was all done in an attempt to qualify Officer Dumeus for the vacant detective position. Although Officer Dumeus was the number three recommendation in the selection process, Assistant Chief Starks bypassed the first and second recommendation from the selection process in selecting Officer Dumeus. Her actions here clearly violate our collective bargaining agreement with the City of Opa-locka.

In another matter in violation of the PBA agreement, Assistant Chief Starks continued to make good on her promise to prefer Black women to specialized units. Starks selected Officer Shantrice Dunn, a Black female, for the Community Policing Unit. The PBA agreement requires that all officers considered for a specialized unit such as Community Policing must have a minimum of two years of experience with the OLPD. At the time of her selection by Assistant Chief Starks, Officer Dunn did not have the experience required under our agreement with the City. Here again, Assistant Chief Starks bypassed, Officer Timothy Bourne, who was discouraged from interviewing. In the same vein, Assistant Chief Starks instructed Officer Brad Kern to only process female applicants for background checks. Officer Kern is responsible for completing background checks on all applicants for the police department. His work must be completed before the city may make an offer to any applicant. The conduct of Assistant Chief Starks not only violates our PBA agreement but potentially lies liability

at the feet of the City for her violation of federal labor and employment law as well as the City's own policies and procedures. We provided details of the hostile work environment, the violation of federal law, the intrusion in investigations, and Starks' potential collusion with her attorney in our complaints to the City Manager.

Once our complaints were submitted to City Manager Williams, the swiftness by which he started the process of review led us to believe that an honest and serious investigation was occurring by a neutral third party. However, almost immediately, Vice Mayor Natasha Ervin began publicly attacking the City Manager and the Opa-locka Police Department from the dais. This came subsequent to the City Manager filing a whistleblower complaint against her and Assistant Chief Starks requesting that the Vice Mayor message her privately on facebook.

Perhaps in working with Assistant Chief Starks, at the Commission Meeting held on July 24, 2024, Vice Mayor Ervin called for the investigation of the OLPD and railed into the investigations of the Criminal Investigations Unit as "dead wrong." She then publicly apologized to a potential suspect of one of our investigations, a woman she had invited to the Commission meeting.

At the very next Commission meeting held on September 11, 2024, she wrongly accused the OLPD of providing security to former Commissioner and current Commission-candidate Chris Davis.

It is important to note that Chris Davis is the victim in the first aforementioned arrest where the suspect was charged with attempted murder. The suspect's attorney, Mr. Pizzi is not only Assistant Chief Starks' attorney, he also has a special relationship with Vice Mayor Ervin. He funds many of her activities and events. While the Vice Mayor attacks us from the dais, Mr. Pizzi attacks us through the media, and Assistant Chief Starks attacks us from within.

It is also important to note that Chris Davis is the political opponent of former Commissioner and current Commission-candidate Audrey Dominguez. Ms. Dominguez is supported by Vice Mayor Ervin in her candidacy and also worked with Assistant Chief in attempting to derail one of our aforementioned arrests.

The same week of the September 11th Commission meeting, Assistant Chief Starks made the claim via email that the City Manager did not have the authority to hire an investigator. This claim was next made in an email by her attorney and Vice Mayor Ervin's supporter, Mr. Pizzi. To our shock, the Vice Mayor then made this same claim at our September 11, 2024 Commission Meeting. Although nothing in our Charter, Ordinances, or policies or procedures supports this claim, City Attorney Burnadette Norris-Weeks supported the claim. She also pressed that, although the Charter does not providing her any spending authority, engagement of all investigations should be under her authority.

At the very next Commission Meeting held on September 25, 2024, the City Commission voted to remove all past, current, and future investigations from the City Manager and place them under the purview of City Attorney Norris-Weeks. The very next day, on September 26, 2024, City Attorney Norris-Weeks contacted the independent and neutral third party investigator and directed her to cease her inquiry of our complaints against Assistant Chief Starks. As almost in tandem, Mr. Pizzi immediately thereafter shot off an email to the investigator and the leadership of the OLPD that his client, Assistant Chief Starks would no longer be following Chief Ottley's directive to cooperate and participate in the review of our complaints in accord with the Law Enforcement Officer's Bill of Rights. Among us, we have hundreds of years of police experience. None of us can think of ever hearing of a City Attorney involving herself in the investigation of a police officer in this manner.

Sir, we have now sustained attacks from Assistant Chief Starks, Vice Mayor Ervin, City Attorney Norris-Weeks, former Commissioner Audrey Dominguez, and attorney Michael Pizzi. This has been done as retaliation for us doing our jobs and doing them effectively. We deserve to work in an environment free of harassment and discrimination. We deserve to have our valid complaints appropriately and timely reviewed by a neutral and unbiased third party.

We have exhausted all avenues and processes under our collective bargaining agreement. At this time, we see no other recourse than to seek aid and support from your office.

In sincere prayer for relief,

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Sergeant Cory Krotenberg

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Sergeant Marcos Gonzalez

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Detective Ludwin Vielman

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Officer Timothy Bourne

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Detective Jose Trigo  
OLPD PBA Representative