



LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS OF MARYLAND, INC.

The Maryland House of Delegates, 6 Bladen Street, Room 300, Annapolis, Maryland 21401
410-841-3185 • 301-858-3185, Fax 410-841-3175 • 301-858-3175 • Black.Caucus@house.state.md.us

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Chair

Delegate Barbara A. Robinson, District 40

1st Vice Chair

Delegate Alonzo T. Washington, District 22

2nd Vice Chair

Delegate Cheryl D. Glenn, District 45

Treasurer

Delegate Benjamin Brooks, District 10

Secretary

Delegate Diana M. Fennell, District 47A

Chaplain

Delegate Angela Angel, District 25

Parliamentarian

Delegate Darryl Barnes, District 25

Historian

Senator Delores G. Kelley, District 10

Executive Director

Alison Assannah-Carroll

MEMBERS

Senator Joanne C. Benson, District 24

Senator Joan Carter Conway, District 43

Senator Ulysses Currie, District 25

Senator Lisa A. Gladden, District 41

Senator Nathaniel J. McFadden, District 45

Senator C. Anthony Muse, District 26

Senator Shirley Nathan-Pulliam, District 44

Senator Catherine E. Pugh, District 40

Delegate Curt Anderson, District 43

Delegate Vanessa E. Atterbeary, District 13

Delegate Darryl Barnes, District 25

Delegate Erik L. Barron, District 24

Delegate Talmadge Branch, District 45

Delegate Alfred C. Carr, Jr., District 18

Delegate Jill P. Carter, District 41

Delegate Frank M. Conaway, Jr., District 40

Delegate Dereck Davis, District 25

Delegate Tawanna P. Gaines, District 22

Delegate Antonio L. Hayes, District 40

Delegate Keith E. Haynes, District 44A

Delegate Terri L. Hill, District 12

Delegate Marvin E. Holmes, Jr., District 23B

Delegate Carolyn J.B. Howard, District 24

Delegate Michael A. Jackson, District 27B

Delegate Dr. Jay Jalisi, District 10

Delegate Adrienne A. Jones, District 10

Delegate Tony Knotts, District 26

Delegate Cory V. McCray, District 45

Delegate Dan K. Morhaim, M.D., District 11 (Associate Member)

Delegate Nathaniel T. Oaks, District 41

Delegate Edith J. Patterson, District 28

Delegate Joseline A. Peña-Melnyk, District 21

Delegate James E. Proctor, Jr., District 27A

Delegate Sheree Sample-Hughes, District 37A

Delegate William C. Smith, Jr., District 20

Delegate Charles Sydnor, III, Esq., District 44B

Delegate Jimmy Tarlau, District 47A (Associate Member)

Delegate Frank S. Turner, District 13

Delegate Michael L. Vaughn, District 24

Delegate Jay Walker, District 26

Delegate Mary L. Washington, Ph.D, District 43

Delegate C.T. Wilson, District 28

August 24, 2015

Maryland Open Meetings Compliance Board
C/O Attorney General's Office
200 St. Paul Place
Baltimore, MD 21202
OpenGov@oag.state.md.us

Dear Members of the Open Meeting Compliance Board:

We write, on behalf of the citizens of Pocomoke City, regarding allegations of egregious actions by their local government, denying their fundamental rights of fair representation and open government.

Recently, the Mayor and City Council voted to terminate the first African-American police chief, Kelvin Sewell, who, by all accounts, was doing an excellent job. Upon his termination, the mayor refused to divulge a reason for this action and has continued to remain silent, much to the consternation of the African American community, amid allegations Sewell's firing was racially motivated.

We are aware that an Open Meetings Act (the "Act") complaint has been filed by the ACLU of Maryland. The complaint alleges the Pocomoke City Council decided to terminate Chief Sewell during secret meetings in violation of the Act.

The letter of complaint alleges, in pertinent part, that Mayor Bruce Morrison, summoned the council, via text message and phone calls, without notifying the public as the law requires. It further alleges that there was no vote taken during open session to close the meeting. Additionally, the complaint alleges the council failed to provide any public documentation, in the form of meeting minutes, that the meeting ever occurred. As of the writing of this letter, the Pocomoke City Solicitor conceded the lack of an open meeting to The Washington Post, in a recent article, stating the council was unaware of the law. If true, this is wholly unacceptable.

We are concerned by these allegations that the Mayor and City Council of Pocomoke has violated the laws that govern public bodies. Thus, we urge your prompt investigation of the ACLU complaint. We support the rights of the citizens of Pocomoke to hold their government accountable. Furthermore, we agree, with the ACLU, that an action undertaken in an illegal meeting should be voided. Thus, if the allegations are substantiated, that Chief Sewell's termination was conducted, illegally, the termination should not stand.

Delegate Carter traveled to Pocomoke City to represent the Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland (LBCM) at a council meeting in July. It was apparent, at that meeting, how important Chief Sewell was, not only to the city's crime fighting efforts, but to the African-American community at large.

We've learned, from residents of Pocomoke City, that Chief Sewell implemented a well-received and effective strategy of community policing that reconnected many African American residents with the police department while reducing crime to historic lows. It seemed a model strategy for reducing crime without the heavy handed tactics that have caused a seemingly intractable rift between the Black community and law enforcement throughout Maryland.

Should the allegations be substantiated, we urge your office to vigorously enforce the laws that govern public bodies and the rights of the citizenry to observe them. The residents of Pocomoke City deserve open and transparent government like all other residents of Maryland.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Delegate Barbara A. Robinson".

Delegate Barbara Robinson
Chair, Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland

Delegate Cheryl Glenn
2nd Vice Chair, Legislative Black Caucus of Maryland

Delegate Jill P Carter