

Media Contact

Shamika Pullum: s.pullum@thefreedombloc.org

Freedom BLOC and community leaders demand immediate resignation of Chief Harding

AKRON, OH — As we approach two years since the passing of Issue 10 in Akron, the Mayor of Akron, Shammas Malik, and the newly hired police chief, Chief Brian Harding, still refuse to hold the Akron Police Department accountable for abusive actions against its citizens — particularly its Black citizens they are sworn to protect. Akron Police Officer Thomas Shoemaker's despicable behavior during the arrest of Dierra Fields is not only an abuse of power, but also inhumane — he should not only be punished for his actions, but he should be terminated from his position as well.

This incident is not an isolated occurrence or an exception from the norm. Along with several other cases, this recent example merely highlights a pattern of practice that demonstrates the violent nature of the Akron Police Department. While newly hired Independent Police Auditor Anthony Finnell sharply criticized Officer Thomas Shoemaker for body slamming and arresting Dierra Fields in January, the incident also brings to question the supervisors, like Sergeant Jason Belacic, who ceremonially sign off on — and defend — these actions, and thereby continue to enable this type of behavior by their officers.

Issue 10 calls for improved community relations between the police department and its citizens. After reviewing this incident, Auditor Finnell released recommendations that would begin that process, yet Mayor Malik and Chief Harding have rejected that notion — and therefore the cries of the Akron community — by not following those recommendations. City Council members would have us believe that this is a flaw of the charter amendment passed by the citizens, when in actuality, it's a flaw of the City Council for failing to pass legislation that enforces the spirit of the charter. A charter amendment is simply a foundational skeleton of principles that provides a framework for future legislation. Legislation created by the governing body (Akron City Council or Summit County Council) either strengthens or weakens the power of the community; with their inaction in legislating on Issue 10, they have decided to weaken our collective power.

The continued abuse of Akron citizens by the very body hired to protect them is a failure on the City of Akron and the Malik administration. The Freedom BLOC and our community members have no confidence in either the governing body of Akron nor the Mayor, and therefore we are demanding the immediate resignation of Police Chief Brian Harding. His inability to hold his officers and supervisors accountable is an extreme flaw in the system of accountability and requires immediate action for the protection of the most vulnerable populations in Akron.

Ray Greene Jr
Executive Director
Freedom BLOC

###

The Freedom BLOC (Black Led Organizing Collaborative) was created to build Black political power and to equip the Black community with capacity building tools on civic education, civic engagement, campaign management and leadership development. Learn more at www.thefreedombloc.org/home