

Lawsuit: Pureval, Long, 'conspired' to fire Washington

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Former Cincinnati Fire Chief Michael Washington, who was fired last month on allegations that he created a hostile work environment for female firefighters, is accusing the mayor and city manager of conspiring to fire him on bogus charges.

In a lawsuit filed Wednesday against the city in federal court, Washington alleges he suffers from "post-traumatic stress disorder due to this incident" and that the firing came on the eight-year anniversary of the death of his friend and fellow firefighter Daryl Gordon, who died in a fire, made the firing all the more traumatic.

Washington named Mayor Aftab Pureval and City Manager Sheryl Long, alleging he was drummed "out of office"

by Long without "prior warning." The lawsuit also says the charges were a "grab bag" of "purported charges" that aren't true.

Long never spoke to Washington about her concerns, the lawsuit alleges, and "Long and Pureval conspired to manufacture bogus reasons for terminating Chief Washington."

"Chief Washington has had no opportunity to defend himself from these groundless and exaggerated charges and they did not remotely come close to giving defendants 'cause' to terminate his employment under the city charter," the lawsuit says.

And, it says, "defendants' decision to terminate plaintiff's employment at this particular time made the experience even more devastating and traumatic."

Washington, who is suing for violations of his due process rights, conspiracy to violate his due process, and defa-

mation, is seeking back pay, lost benefits and punitive damages. A spokeswoman for the city declined to comment, saying the city does not comment on pending litigation.

On March 24 Long fired Washington for creating a hostile work environment for female firefighters and then failing to respond to orders that the culture be fixed.

Washington is not capable of overseeing the changes needed to improve the environment for female workers, Long told The Enquirer at the time.

"I want to be clear that I do not tolerate discriminatory, hostile, or unfair working environments in any city department," Long said. "Cincinnatians place their trust in the fire department, which is tasked with keeping all of us safe. If the workplace culture within the department is unhealthy, that's a violation of the community's trust."

A statement from the city manager's

office said there were multiple complaints about workplace culture from female fire department employees during Washington's tenure.

The firing decision was Long's decision alone, but after the firing Pureval said he supported Long's decision.

"Every employee deserves a safe and fair workplace," the mayor said in a statement then. "We have to unequivocally reject and rectify violations of that environment."

An Enquirer review of the former chief's personnel file finds no mention of any of the disciplinary issues Long raised in her letter.

The 123-page file includes performance reviews, commendations, tax forms, vacation requests and some minor infractions dating to his early days with the department in the 1990s. Washington had been a member of the fire department for 30 years, holding every rank and position.