

**June 22, 2021**

**Seattle, WA** – Yesterday evening, the law firms of Terrell Marshall Law Group and Nelson Boyd filed tort claims on behalf of five Black officers alleging widespread acts of racial harassment and discrimination within the University of Washington Police Department.

The tort claims—filed on behalf of every unranked Black officer currently in the Department—describe dozens of hostile workplace incidents over the past four years. For example:

- Racial slurs, including the n-word, directed at Black officers and Black members of the public;
- White officers placing bananas in front of a Black officer’s locker with a note saying, “here’s your lunch, you fucking monkey.”
- White officers sparking their tasers near Black officers in an attempt to intimidate them;
- A White supervisor who struck a Black officer with a stick and said, “You people should be used to being hit with these;” and
- White officers complaining to Black officers about too many Black officers having been hired in the Department.

“Our clients have had to endure a level of racism that is deeply troubling to hear about, much less experience. That this is happening within a police department makes it even more important that we put a stop to it,” said Beth Terrell, one of the officers’ attorneys.

The officers’ claims outline an ongoing pattern of racial insults and mistreatment that supervisors and commanders are aware of and sometimes directly involved in. The officers allege that in addition to the pervasive racial harassment, supervisors have also discouraged Black officers from seeking promotions and retaliated against those who have reported misconduct.

“Our clients want what every employee wants—to be treated respectfully and judged on the merit of their work. As police officers, they also want to be part of a department that treats members of the public with the same fairness and dignity they demand for themselves,” said Deborah Nelson, one of their attorneys.

Washington law prohibits discrimination, harassment, or the creation of a hostile work environment based on race, gender, or sexual orientation. The officers bringing the tort claims include Russell Ellis, Gabriel Golden, Hamani Nowlen, Damien Taylor, and Karinn Young.

Filing a tort claim is a step required by Washington law before a party may bring certain complaints for damages against agencies of the State of Washington, which includes the University of Washington. It is a prerequisite to a civil rights lawsuit over hostile workplace conduct or racial discrimination. Plaintiffs must wait 60 days before filing a complaint in court concerning the matters raised in the tort claim.

Lawyers involved in the case include Deborah Nelson and Jeffrey Boyd of Nelson Boyd PLLC, as well as Beth Terrell, Toby Marshall, and Ryan Tack-Hooper of Terrell Marshall Law Group PLLC.

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