

June 4, 2024

Sent Electronically and by First Class Mail

Jon Mitchell
Mayor, City of New Bedford
133 William Street
New Bedford, MA 02740

RE: The Promotion of Captain Nathaniel Rodriguez Presents New Bedford an Opportunity to Meaningfully Advance Diversity in Police Leadership

Dear Mayor Mitchell:

New Bedford, like a number of richly diverse Massachusetts cities and towns, continues to employ a police department that fails to reflect the community that it serves. That discord is particularly noticeable for the Latino population, which has grown by nearly 50% since 2010.¹ The recent announcement regarding the retirement of New Bedford Police Department (“NBPD”) Deputy Chief, Adelino Sousa, presents the City with a timely opportunity to diversify the leadership of the department. Captain Nathaniel Rodriguez, a long-tenured employee of the NBPD and the first Latino officer to achieve the rank of Captain in the history of the police department, is a leading candidate for the Deputy Chief role who would bring much-needed diversity to NBPD’s ranks. We strongly urge you to take this opportunity to prioritize diverse leadership and to make clear to the community that the police department can and will reflect the rich backgrounds of the people that they serve.

Diversity in a police department is particularly critical for a number of reasons. A diverse police department that embodies the lived experiences of the communities that it serves, is culturally competent, and includes officers who are proficient in languages other than English is far more likely to be adept at serving New Bedford’s diverse residents, enhancing public safety. When that diversity is lacking, as it currently is, the longstanding and inherent mistrust between communities of color and police grows, decreasing police effectiveness and public safety. Finally, as police departments across the Commonwealth struggle to attract and retain a full workforce, any barrier to hiring—including failing to advance initiatives that promote diversity—ultimately leaves the department overworked and the community less safe.

In addition to these commonsense reasons for selecting an eminently-qualified diverse candidate like Captain Rodriguez for the role of Deputy Chief, New Bedford should also be actively trying to counter community perceptions of unfairness and bias. In 2021,

¹ Latinos in Massachusetts: New Bedford, 10-2021, Gaston Institute Publications, https://scholarworks.umb.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1272&context=gaston_pubs.

Citizens for Juvenile Justice, a prominent advocacy-based nonprofit, released [a report](#) concluding that NBPD engaged in widespread racial insensitivity demonstrated by statistically disparate police practices, such as “stop and frisk” and the filing of police reports, against populations of color. Moreover, said report also concluded that a significant contributor of the culture of racial insensitivity was the lack of diversity in the police department leadership. A long history of regular lawsuits against NBPD for employment discrimination similarly give credence to those community perceptions of bias. MCAD records show that between 2000 and 2021, more than 35 complaints were filed against NBPD for employment discrimination. At least one of these complaints resulted in the imposition of anti-discrimination training for all members of NBPD, and a number resulted in costly pay-outs that could have been avoided with more proactive measures, directing taxpayer dollars to public safety.

New Bedford should seize this opportunity to promote Captain Rodriguez to the position of Deputy Chief – which will not only give New Bedford an exceptionally qualified Deputy Chief but also meaningfully enhance departmental diversity. To that end, we would be happy to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Sophia L. Hall

Sophia L. Hall
Deputy Litigation Director

cc: Chief Paul Olivera