

Letter To The Editor: Anita Banks Rebuts Claims In Alton Police Hiring

by Anita Banks

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Letter To The Editor:

I, Anita Banks, would like to offer a rebuttal to the letter written by Lee Barham regarding the hiring of new police officers in Alton. As an 88-year-old African American citizen who has resided in Alton since 1954, I have experienced firsthand the

racial disparities and discrimination that have plagued our community. However, I must say that the only discrimination evident in Mr. Barham's letter is his own.

I am deeply embarrassed by Mr. Barham's misinformed attack on the Chief of Police, the Mayor of Alton, the Alton Branch NAACP, African American clergy, and other leaders of color. Instead of acknowledging the commendable effort by the civil service commission for hiring five qualified officers in a time of nationwide police officer shortages, Mr. Barham chooses to focus on the lack of black officers.

While I agree that it is important for police departments to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, it is also essential to recognize that diversity in the applicant pool is not always representative of the community. It is unfortunate that Mr. Barham did not take the time to engage in informed conversations with the Chief, the Mayor, or community leaders before making his assumptions and accusations.

As a proud citizen of the Alton community, I am grateful to be surrounded by vibrant leaders, including area clergy, elected officials, the Alton Branch NAACP, the Mayor, and the department heads of the city of Alton. While it would be ideal for our police department to mirror the diversity of our community, the reality is that there may be a lack of interest within the minority community in pursuing careers in law enforcement.

In my opinion, to be a police officer is a heart call, and we should focus on ensuring that we have qualified officers who are dedicated to serving and protecting our community, regardless of their race. We should give credit to the Alton Police Department for their tireless efforts, especially in capturing the criminals responsible for the tragic death of Ra' Niya Steward. Might I mention that less than 1% of these dedicated officers were minorities.

In conclusion, it is important to recognize that the lack of diversity in the police department is not the fault of the Chief, the Mayor, the Alton Branch NAACP, or any other community leaders. It is a complex issue with many factors, including a lack of minority applicants. Let us appreciate the efforts of our police department and work towards fostering a community where everyone feels safe and represented.

As a woman of faith, I strongly encourage Mr. Barham to consider the Bible scriptures noted in Psalm 23. In addition, as a community, we should always, always seek to understand before jumping to conclusions.

Sincerely,

Anita Banks

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