

# Community Members Protest Lack of Black Police Officers in Alton

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter  
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ALTON - A few community members spent the day protesting outside of the Alton Police Department on Feb. 23, 2024.

Led by Lee Barham, the community members were protesting the lack of Black officers in the police department. Alton hired five new white officers earlier this month. In a

[recent letter to the editor](#), Barham expressed disgust about the hiring of no new Black officers, and he called on Mayor David Goins, Police Chief Jarrett Ford, the Alton chapter of the NAACP, local Black leaders and others to do more. He echoed these sentiments during the Feb. 23 protest.

“I feel it is a tragedy that we elected the first Black mayor and we only have one Black officer down here,” Barham said. “We’re not reaching out to our own, but when it comes to the election, we’re going to be reminded, ‘I’m Black, I want you all to vote.’ But by the same token, where’s the Black officers? Where’s the difference you have made? There isn’t any.”

Barham called Goins “the best ambassador that we have” and noted that the mayor used to be a police officer with the City of Alton. Barham added that civic leaders “from our Black pastors to the NAACP” want to be on “ceremonial platforms” but have done “nothing” while in their positions.

Barham also said he wants to see the percentages of Black candidates and white candidates who failed to secure the job. He said there is an “outcry” among community members and he plans to protest “until this problem is rectified.”

“The optics is that every white candidate that comes through the academy, they pass. Every Black that comes through there, they fail,” he added. “I hear that they said, ‘Well, we don’t have quality Black candidates.’ It’s a slap to the Black community’s face because now you’re telling the kids that are coming along, ‘You’re not qualified to do it.’”

Barham said there are benefits to having Black officers in the department. For example, he noted that a Black officer might be able to point out some of the “racial things” that a white officer would be oblivious to.

He said the mayor has to answer to the voters, whether it’s Goins or another mayor in the future.

“We vote out incompetence in 2025,” Barham said, referring to the upcoming mayoral election. “But then whoever gets in there, they won’t have a free pass, either. They will have to have a program in place. I want to know what your first 90 days is going to affect. I want to know your hiring practices, what you feel about Alton’s Black police officers that we need. And we’ll hold them accountable for that. Because there’s not going to be a lifetime appointment, because we pay your salary.”

The Mayor’s Office did not immediately respond to requests for comment.