

December 6, 2006

Chief Dwight Pettiford  
United States Park Police  
1100 Ohio Drive, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20024

Dear Chief Pettiford;

As you are aware, the Force has been struggling with personnel, equipment and training issues for years. These issues can be traced back to fiscal challenges that we continue to encounter. Members of Congress have made it very clear that the Force is expected to be more accountable in the financial management area. The solution was the hiring of a Chief Financial Officer (C.F.O.) with experience in the operation of a federal budget. I was pleased when a C.F.O. was brought onto the Force and believed that the financial challenges would begin to be corrected. Sadly, the situation has only regressed into a greater mess.

This past July, several recruits were to begin their careers in law enforcement with the Force. These recruits were notified of their selection and given a hiring date and instructed to report for duty. Many had already left their jobs or were at parties given by their co-workers when they received a call stating that they would not be hired. The notification was given at the last minute. This blunder has had several detrimental effects on the Force. They include the loss of confidence with the public and potential applicants, the further loss of morale of Force members, and a loss of confidence within the Department of the Interior, National Park Service and Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC) for jeopardizing the class that had representatives from other Interior bureaus. Also, the shortage of these recruits widened the growing attrition gap.

Also, in July, the Labor Committee was advised that the Horse Mounted Patrol (HMP) Unit was ordered to cut the feed to half rations since there was a significant shortage of grain and it was unclear whether additional feed would be delivered. Although certain members of the Force did not feel there was a grain shortage, I found the situation to be very serious and with the approval of our Executive Board, used Labor Committee funds to purchase a large quantity of grain to feed the horses. Additionally, I found that many vendors who provided services to the HMP Unit had significant amounts of money owed to them. Some of the vendors would not provide further services to the Force without payment at the same time.

The HMP Unit is not alone. All units within the Force have had their operations impaired due to the financial situation. Members of the Motorcycle Unit have purchased motorcycle parts out of pocket to keep their motorcycles running to meet their responsibilities of traffic changes, demonstrations, Presidential, Vice-Presidential and dignitary escorts. Members of the Canine Unit have purchased equipment out of pocket

to meet their mission as well. One canine handler had to pay out of pocket fees for kenneling services because the Force did not meet its obligations. Another canine handler paid the costs for refreshments during a canine graduation ceremony that was planned by management with specific specifications. Members of the Marine Patrol Unit have purchased minor repair items to keep the boats running properly. Members of the HMP Unit have paid out of pocket expenses to the furrier so the horses may be ridden on patrol. There are sure to be many other unknown cases similar to the ones described above.

The vehicle fleet has also suffered. Very few vehicles are being introduced into the fleet to replace older vehicles that need frequent and costly repairs. The lack of vehicles will eventually prevent some units/districts from fulfilling their missions. Most importantly, our working vehicle fleet is in such poor condition that officers are in precarious positions when expediting to major incidents.

The situation with Force contracts has also had a negative impact. The leased vehicle program has created problems, especially with the Criminal Investigations Branch. The facility cleaning service contracts have resulted in hazardous conditions from overflowing trash cans, infrequently swept floors, filthy restrooms and mold growing in shower facilities. Without notifying the Union, management has secured the bottled water in AOF. If the bottles are empty, only a small number of individuals have access to replace the water bottle. This problem has a dramatic effect on weekends or on weekdays after 5 pm.

I am aware that there were two audits of the Force. I am aware that the Force cannot expend funds without approval of the National Park Service. I am aware that there have been changes made to the way funds are spent. I am aware that a Fiscal Year 2007 financial plan is being drafted. In the future these steps may help move the Force forward, but the men and women of the U.S. Park Police deserve an explanation of how the system failed and when we can anticipate positive changes in the current conditions.

As you read this letter I hope you understand that the dedicated men and women of this agency have done whatever it takes to accomplish the mission, even at his or her own expense. While officers are held accountable for their performance, we expect that the same accountability be held to those responsible for the deteriorating financial situation. This has been going on for too long and serious steps to correct the current conditions need to be taken immediately. Although the Force is currently in a poor condition financially, we are not aware of anyone being injured as a result. However, I believe that it is just a matter of time before an officer is seriously or fatally injured.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jim Austin  
Chairman