

Arrest of high level DPW official prompts councilman to question city's employment practices - MAYOR JOINS COUNCILMAN BILL COLE IN CALLING FOR HEARING TO PROBE MUNICIPAL EMPLOYMENT POLICY

By Stephen Janis, *Investigative Voice*, April 5, 2011

The 15-year-old boy told police a middle-aged man driving a white BMW pulled over in the 3500 block of Shannon Road last November, rolled down the window, and asked him where he could find marijuana. The boy said when he told the man he couldn't help, the conversation soon turned to sex. "How old are you?" asked the driver.

"Fifteen," answered the boy. "Do you want to have sex?" the man then asked, according to the police report. The boy said no, managing to record the tag number of the vehicle as the driver sped away.

The incident led to the arrest and guilty plea of a Department of Public Works superintendent named Michael Lucas on charges of fourth degree sex offense last year, a top level supervisor whose ability to keep his job despite a series of criminal charges is prompting a key city councilman to call for hearings on Baltimore's municipal employment practices.

"While I recognize that the policy now requires employees who are arrested for certain crimes to report the incident," said City Councilman William H. Cole 4th (D-11th), "I'd like to explore that policy to determine if it goes far enough."

Cole plans to call for a council hearing on the new requirements that mandate employees to report when they are arrested. He said he would make the request at the council's next regular meeting Monday.

WASN'T HIS ONLY RUN-IN INVOLVING MINOR

In fact, Lucas's encounter with the 15-year-old boy wasn't his only run-in with the law involving a minor.

According to court documents Lucas's stepdaughter swore out charges against the DPW chief in March of 2010, claiming he had struck her on the lip during an argument. Police found a significant wound on her face and a warrant was then issued for Lucas's arrest on charges of second degree assault. However, police told *Investigative Voice* and *I.V.*'s media partner WBFF-Fox45-TV that the Warrant Apprehension Task Force had not served the warrant until this week.

Still, it is Lucas's ability to hold his position as a top level supervisor of the Department of Public Works' Kane Street Yard — a job classified as Level 5, or "most sensitive" — that has prompted criticism from Cole, who is now planning to request council approval for him to hold hearings on Baltimore's municipal employment policies.

“When Mayor [Stephanie] Rawlings-Blake instituted the [disclosure] policy, it was absolutely appropriate and necessary,” Cole told *Investigative Voice* and Fox45. “Given the issues we've discovered over the last few weeks, it is wholly appropriate for the council to call for a hearing to discuss the arrest policy and review best practices.”

The mayor concurs with Cole's proposal for hearings, the councilman said.

QUESTIONS ARE BEING RAISED

The questions are being raised even as high profile cases of employee malfeasance and criminal transgression make headlines.

Last week Department of Public Works officials suspended another DPW worker after he used a city vehicle to move junk for a resident for a fee — the same employee who was the subject of a scathing report by the city's Inspector General, whose investigators chronicled the man's on-the-clock gambling and drinking at an East Baltimore deli.

Today the Inspector General released a report critical of the Housing Department for promoting a housing inspector who had a lengthy criminal record.

DPW officials say Lucas was compliant with the city's so-called self-reporting policy instituted last year by Rawlings-Blake after another DPW employee collected sick pay while serving eight months of a two-year prison sentence for sexually abusing a minor.

DPW spokeswoman Celeste Amato defended Lucas's tenure as deputy superintendent of the Kane Street Yard as exemplary, even as Lucas was being led out of the facility in handcuffs after police served a warrant.

“These are taxpayer funded jobs, and while mistakes happen, chronic criminal behavior cannot be tolerated,” said Cole.

“ I firmly believe that we can find people who are willing to work for the city to replace those that can't stay out of trouble.”