



Sheila Mathews <sheila@the-grip.net>

Request for information

Sheila Mathews <sheila@the-grip.net>
 To: Mike Yates <myates@cityofgriffin.com>
 Bcc: Sheila Marshall <sheila@the-grip.net>

Thu, Oct 24, 2019 at 3:54 PM

Chief Yates,

I have received certain records in response to an Open Records request for all information related to an investigation of Cpt. Chris Webb based on a complaint filed by LaShonda Thomas.

The complainant wrote, "Arrived at GHS to pick up my child. When I walk in Chris Webb didn't even give me or my son a chance to talk. He was yelling, being very aggressive, pushing up and talking to my child who is only 15 like a thug on the streets. I was outside when I address my son to be quiet and to come on. I felt very harassed by him. I would like action to be taking towards him (sic all)."

This complaint was sustained.

Disciplinary records indicate Sgt. Joe Hudson stated, in part, to Cpl. Webb, "...you had an encounter with a student and his mother. During the encounter, which was recorded on your city issued body camera you became agitated and unprofessional."

This calls into question the circumstances surrounding, and the basis of, the arrests of LaShonda Thomas and her 15-year-old son.

While I received some records, I have been denied access to Cpl. Webb's body camera recording because these criminal cases have not yet been adjudicated. However, in reference to this type of recording, an article on The Pike County Times website this week quoted you as saying, "Most of the time when we get an Open Records Request from the press for these videos, they are really not subject to the Open Records Act because most of the time, those have not been adjudicated," Chief Yates advised in this interview. "What we do is try to weigh the value of it and a lot of times, if we can send it, we go ahead and send it."

The article went on to state, "He said that an example of this is the McDowell video when there was a big public interest so they sent it out to show that what was being said was not what happened. 'There are times when I can't,' he said. 'But most of the time, we send it whether it's subject to Open Records or not...We don't have anything to hide.'"

Just as in the McDowell case you referenced in that quote, the arrest of LaShonda Thomas also generated tremendous public interest, as can be attested by the press release your agency posted on the City of Griffin Police Department Facebook page, which garnered (as of today) 228 reactions, 457 comments and 147 shares, numbers that far exceed the average on the page.

I believe it is in the public interest to release Cpl. Webb's body camera footage. There was no hesitation to release a body worn camera recording that indicated one officer's actions were justifiable and well within the proper scope of policy and procedure. If you meant what you said – that you have nothing to hide – Cpl. Webb's video should likewise be released. There was no hesitation to release a public statement alleging certain actions on the part of Ms. Thomas and her son. The actions of a law enforcement officer should be just as transparent, particularly when one is found to have violated the agency's Standard Operating Procedure during this incident.

I understand it may take longer than today to release the body camera recording, but as I will be publishing my first article on this matter tonight, I respectfully request by 5 p.m. today a response indicating whether you will agree to release the recording prior to adjudication.

Thank you,
 Sheila Mathews
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GPD Thomas FB post.jpg
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