



CHIEF OF POLICE

BENNINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT
118 SOUTH STREET
BENNINGTON, VERMONT 05201
PAUL J. DOUCETTE

PRESS RELEASE

Chief Paul J. Doucette

September 1, 2018

In response to the allegations concerning the Bennington Police Department failing to assist Representative Ruqaiyah Morris, I feel it necessary to explain the position of the Bennington Police Department and all of our efforts to assist Representative Morris and her family. All of the complaints filed by Representative Morris and her husband James have been investigated appropriately and efficiently.

In September 2016, I had meetings with Representative Morris and James Lawton concerning possible threats against Representative Morris. Neither James nor Representative Morris wished to file a police report at the time and asked that I be aware of the perceived threats. I passed the information along to members of the Bennington Police Department and directed the staff to increase patrols in the area of their residence.

In October 2016, Representative Morris and James Lawton filed a complaint against an individual for threats. The matter was investigated by the Bennington Police Department, reviewed and there was not sufficient evidence to bring criminal charges forward.

From this time until July 2018, the Bennington Police Department did not receive any complaints from Representative Morris or James Lawton concerning threatening behavior. On July 27, 2018, a friend of Representative Morris contacted me at the Bennington Police Department and said Representative Morris was upset with me because I failed to return a call to her husband, James Lawton. In fact I never received a telephone call from Lawton nor had he left any messages for me. I telephoned Representative Morris and spoke with her directly.

Representative Morris advised me she and her husband were being threatened again. She further advised she reported the threats to the Capitol Police in Montpelier. Representative Morris advised her husband James would like to talk with me. I advised her I would assign an officer to contact James.



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Representative Morris did contact me later and advised she spoke with James and he advised her he never called me or left a message.

Officer Michael Sharhson made several attempts to contact James Lawton. Officer Sharson was able to speak with James about threats and possible hacking of his computer. Representative Morris emailed screen shots of information directly to me and I forwarded the information to the investigating officer. Officer Sharhson completed a report and sent the information to the Bennington County State's Attorney's Office for review.

Both computers were taken as evidence and were held at the Bennington Police Department. The investigating officer had Representative Morris sign a consent to search the computers but she did not provide the passcodes. Representative Morris advised the investigation officer she would speak with her husband and then contact the officer with the passcodes. Several days passed and Representative Morris failed to provide the passcodes. I received a call from a representative at the Vermont Attorney General's Office inquiring about the computers. The computers were still in the Bennington Police Department evidence room as we did not have the passcodes. The investigating officer went back to the residence and obtained the passcodes from Representative Morris.

Within a few hours of the passcodes being provided by Representative Morris, James Lawton presented himself at the Bennington Police Department requesting the immediate return of the computers. The computers were not returned to him. The investigating officer drove the computers to Waterbury and delivered them to the Vermont State Police for analysis.

Bennington County State's Attorney Erica Marthage and I conversed about this case several times and felt the case best be handled by the Vermont Attorney General's Office. At the time I spoke with State's Attorney Marthage, we only had the information from James Lawton and screen shots of information provided by Representative Morris. I didn't feel there was sufficient evidence to charge anyone with a crime. State's Attorney Erica Marthage and I both conversed with a representative from the Vermont Attorney General's Office.



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Like many other municipal law enforcement agencies, the Bennington Police Department does not have a computer forensics investigation unit. The computers had to be sent to the Vermont State Police and that was accomplished once the passcodes were obtained.

On August 31, 2018, I met with an investigator with the Vermont State Police and provided all of the reports and documents we had pertaining to this investigation. These are the same documents that were provided to the Bennington County State's Attorney's Office and the Vermont Attorney General's Office.

No further details about this investigation may be released at this time pending the investigation of the Vermont State Police.