

January 10, 2012

Mayor Perrin,

Thank you for your letter of November 15, 2011, to the Diversity Coalition of Jonesboro. You indicated that recommendations “regarding recruiting of minority applicants for the future will be given thoughtful consideration.” We respectfully disagree with your statement that we have been “given all the information that you requested.” Although some requests have been met, significant gaps remain, specifically the written request delivered November 10, 2011. Further, some information was given verbally and not in writing.

Developing a diverse workforce requires three major components: recruitment, selection (applicant evaluation), and retention. At this time the Coalition is largely limiting its recommendations to recruitment. The Coalition’s initial recommendations on improving diversity of police officers and firefighters have been carefully prepared and are listed below. These are first steps. At a later date, pending the obtaining of further data as requested on 11-10-11, we will submit recommendations for improving selection and retention.

The Diversity Coalition of Jonesboro desires to improve the quality of life for all Jonesboro residents. We look forward to your input and to suggestions from City Council members and Department heads and to strategizing with you and others on ways to increase diversity.

Sincerely,

Diversity Coalition of Jonesboro

John Gibson, Co-Chair

Dr. George Grant, Co-Chair

Copies: Members of the City Council

Diversity Recruitment and Outreach Approaches for Jonesboro Public Safety Departments

Four hundred and seven (407) applicants applied for Jonesboro Police Department positions during the last four recruitment cycles. Forty-eight (48) of the applicants were minorities, representing approximately 12 percent (11.8%) of the total applicant pool. These figures reflect a clear recruitment disparity when one considers that minorities represent nearly 25 percent of the city's population (African Americans, 19.5%; Hispanics, 5.2% --U. S. Census, 2010). Equivalent Fire Department data were not provided. To create a greater balance, public safety departments must **exercise more aggressive strategies in recruiting qualified minority members and women.**

Some of the community relations and recruitment recommendations that we suggest for improving the recruitment of qualified applicants, especially minorities and women, by the Public Safety Departments include the following:

1. Creation of a Public Safety Diversity Task Force, comprised of a diverse constituency (e.g., city employees, members of the local clergy, commerce, government, non-profit organizations, institutions of higher education). The Task Force would provide input on recruitment (and later, hiring and retention) and meet periodically with the police and fire department chiefs and the mayor.
2. Development of a Public Safety Recruitment Team comprised of diverse membership that conducts or participates in career-day programs and job fairs at area high schools, community colleges and universities, churches, community centers, etc. Outreach efforts should also include recruitment presentations at (a) community college and university Criminal Justice Programs (state-wide), (b) all-day workshops, panel discussions, and presentation of internship opportunities, and (c) recognition awards supported by local public safety department heads/chiefs.
3. Provision of sample tests and testing guides (with guidance from the test publisher) by the Jonesboro Police Department. The Jonesboro Fire Department already provides such materials for its written exam.
4. Provision of a convincing statement with each vacancy announcement emphasizing the goal of improving diversity in its departments.
5. Development and distribution of PDF-formatted job announcements of all vacancies in all Jonesboro City departments via a network of established recruitment partners in Jonesboro and the region, including:
 - a. all local churches & community centers, ethnic & gender organizations, educational & training institutions (to specific departments & faculty), and local & regional veterans organizations
 - b. other job web sites, such as AR Workforce & the Chamber of Commerce.

6. Regular visits to area churches to present information on vacancies, providing detailed literature with relevant qualifications, specific instructions, and the dates, times and locations for applying and testing.
7. Hosting of open houses including invitations to youth and adults targeting public safety careers. Facilitate and/or provide training and development for potential future First Responders on High School and College campuses, again using a diverse training staff.
8. Creation and support of youth mentoring programs, which offer approaches to avoiding trouble, eliminating risky behaviors, and ways to report potentially risky situations.
9. Provision of attractive brochures on “Careers in Law Enforcement and Fire Protection in Jonesboro, Arkansas,” which should be widely distributed in local and nearby communities, including churches, high schools, community colleges and universities, and public social and cultural events. (If one already exists, we would welcome the opportunity to examine it and provide suggestions and help facilitate its distribution.)
10. Development of diverse interview panels to reflect the demographic profile of the Jonesboro community, including community membership and officers from the various ranks. Following appropriate deliberations, the panel will forward its recommendations to department chiefs. Such a panel would demonstrate the departments’ commitment to diversity, reduce the risk of bias in ratings, provide a heterogeneous perspective, and protect the public’s interests.

The Diversity Coalition of Jonesboro believes that the city should go beyond advertisements in the newspaper and announcements on the city website to make prospective candidates aware of vacancies, requirements, the application process, and the nature of the examinations. These examples of advertising and outreach activities can improve efforts to convince the target population that a career in public safety in our community offers inclusive, long-term and secure employment and will serve our community’s long-term interests.