

# **Whistle blower claims Federal Programs Director Lakeylah White ordered department personnel to wash and detail her personal vehicle.**

Alexander Payton, a former HUB City transit mechanic, went on the record with the Hattiesburg Patriot to describe the problems in the Mass Transit Department where he was once employed. His statements shed light on the events that led up to the now viral video of two transit drivers sitting in a van all day for weeks on end.

Payton was hired with the city's Mass Transit Department as a mechanic in January on 2015. In the spring of 2016 a \$35,000 per year Crew Supervisor position was created. The position was never posted on the city's job listing website, which is city policy for a newly created position, nor were any other applicants, including department employees, allowed to apply. According to Payton, prior to the Crew Supervisor position being created, Reginald (Reggie) Smith, a driver in the department, was heard bragging to coworkers that he had a job on the horizon which was being created especially for him. When the job of Crew Supervisor was established, Smith was hired.

The job description seemed to be written with Smith in mind. The job qualifications required four years of mass transportation experience plus two years of supervisory experience. Smith was a bus driver for over four years with Petal prior to coming to Hattiesburg, and he and his wife also owned a cleaning service. Smith claimed the cleaning service gave him the necessary supervisory experience to meet the

requirements.

The department suffered low morale, when long standing employees of the department were denied an opportunity to apply. The problem, however, was that the job description appeared to be designed to exclude everyone but Smith.

When most people hit the ground running in an new job, Smith hit his sleeping according to Alexanzder Payton. Payton even filed a complaint against Smith for sleeping on the job with Mass Transit Director, Vincent Nelms. According to Payton, this led to a hostile work environment and retaliation on the part of Smith, since Smith became aware of his complaint.

While working under Smith, Payton alleges that he and others were ordered, on a regular basis, to detail the Federal Programs Director's (Lakeylah White) personal vehicle. In the video Payton describes White as a demanding diva, who would make workers not just wash her vehicle, but detail it. Astonishingly, if her vehicle had water marks, he and others would be made to re-wash her car. According to Payton, mechanics and other workers, would even make overtime to wash Mrs. White's personal vehicle when she would bring it by just before the end of the shift.



Federal Programs Director,  
Lakeylah White



Payton was ordered to change a tire similar in size and weight to this 200 pound tire by himself with hand tools as retaliation to his whistle blowing. When he refused, he was fired.

Payton decided to bring these matters to the attention of the Mayor, but according to Payton, the mayor would not meet with him. The very next day, Payton was ordered to change a 200 pound tire without any help. He refused due to the danger of performing such work and was fired as a result. Payton previously injured himself performing that task by himself and brought the injury and lack of proper tools to the attention of Vincent Nelms. Payton was told the department didnt have enough money to purchase a tire machine.

Payton was able to meet with Mayor Dupree during the grievance process, and according to Payton, Dupree supported his firing.

Faced with financial issues, Payton needed unemployment until he could gain other employment, but was denied. Payton appealed the decision to an administrative law judge, and in a very rare decision, the judge ruled that Payton had been wrongfully terminated. Payton has since gained employment.

Since Payton's departure, Mass Transit has come under enormous scrutiny after handicap service drivers were captured on video

sitting in their vans for weeks on end. Handicap residents relied on the service to get to and from doctors appointments. Those who called to schedule an appointment were told the service was not running since the January tornado; when in fact the department just wasn't providing the service.