



The Times

Transfer of cop draws criticism Community voices anger over the reassignment

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BY KEVIN SHEA

TRENTON -- Police officers are transferred all the time and mostly without public scrutiny.

But city Detective Luis Reyes' job as a community affairs officer in the South District is to work with the public every day and his transfer last week is not going over well.

The community has launched a campaign to bring Reyes back, and some charge the move -- Reyes is heading to midnight patrol in the North District -- is political and not about policing.

Reyes declined to comment yesterday, and Police Director Joseph Santiago denied the transfer was politically motivated.

Reyes' transfer hit the public Thursday, and by Friday more than 400 residents had signed petitions and dropped them off at Santiago's office.

Yesterday, they continued to come in.

Residents and leaders all gush about Reyes, and say he is not only a great person to deal with, but that he's extremely effective.

"When we get a good guy like Reyes and they transfer him, it's pretty disturbing," said Jon Naar, a Mill Hill resident active with the Old Mill Hill Society. Naar, who moved to Trenton seven years ago and considers himself part of the city's renaissance, said Reyes' transfer also came without explanation to the community.

The Millhouse, a long-term care facility on Jersey Street, even made a public statement yesterday about the move, calling Reyes' reassignment an "atrociousness." Reyes is an invaluable resource who can solve any type of problem, a Millhouse spokesperson said.

Jim Carlucci, writing as chairman of the South District's Community Police Advisory Council, immediately sent a letter to the department when he heard Reyes was transferred.

Carlucci said he understands the arguments against allowing outsiders to dictate management decisions in a police department, but that there are times to re-evaluate a decision no matter where it comes. "This is one of those times," he wrote.

If the department really embraces community policing, Carlucci wrote, Reyes' transfer is "counterproductive."

South Ward Councilman Jim Coston is particularly upset about losing Reyes as a liaison.

Coston said if he could personally create a police officer for the job, it would be Reyes. "He seems maybe to be the perfect guy for the job."

But Coston's relationship with Reyes may be a reason for the transfer, police department insiders and Coston himself say.

Coston is the only council member who questions the city administration on a regular basis and since he is

close to Reyes, police sources say, someone had him transferred.

The irony, police sources say, is that Reyes lost his post because he was doing his job: assisting the South District and its leaders.

"Are we concerned with community safety or political vendettas?" Coston asked yesterday. "People's safety ought to come above politics."

On his blog, Coston was more direct, writing he was "personally disgusted" by the transfer and wrote: "It has been suggested to me that my praise of this officer (Reyes) in this blog may be at the root of his transfer. There is likely some truth to this."

Coston said yesterday he would give the benefit of the doubt to the police department to explain the move, and will leave the issue in the hands of the community for now since they are doing a great job of expressing their feelings.

But he will not let the issue go away, he pledged.

Santiago said he does not discuss personnel assignments publicly, but he made an exception last night because of the uproar.

"The transfer of Reyes has absolutely nothing to do with Coston and nothing to do with politics," he said. "And it has nothing to do with Reyes personally."

The harsh truth, he said, is that crime is on the rise in the South District the last five months, about a third of officers in the district had performance problems and Santiago said he was getting complaints -- delivered personally to himself -- from residents about inaction.

Santiago said he also reassigned a command sergeant in the district. "The South," he said, "is not headed where it should be."

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