

Marion officer alleges discrimination

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MARION – A Marion police officer is in the process of filing a complaint against the city alleging he is being discriminated against because of his race.

Sgt. Angelo Hightower, a 14-year veteran of the department, alleges he has not been promoted to lieutenant because he is black, he said Tuesday.

The position became open in April when former Lt. Dawn Tondini was promoted to interim chief. She takes over as chief on Friday.

The lieutenant's position remains unfilled, and in May city council members talked about eliminating it altogether.

The position was created about a year ago. At that time, Tondini and Hightower were the only candidates, he said. When she was promoted, Hightower was next in line for the position as the only officer eligible for the job.

"I'm being singled out," said Hightower, now in the process of filing a discrimination charge with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

"This is just part of a concerted effort to keep me at the proverbial glass ceiling," he added.

No council action has been taken on the position, but Mayor Bob Butler said city officials do not believe it is needed, particularly, when patrolman are.

The department has 33 officers, including the chief. Among them, four are currently off-duty for an extended period for a variety of reasons, the mayor said.

Butler said race is not an issue. "Hightower can do what he wants. He can say what he thinks, even if he is wrong. We think he is wrong," Butler said.

The position was created under the suggestion of former Chief John Eibeck as a possible benefit to the city, but Butler reiterated that officials have since concluded it is not needed, he said.

In May, the mayor said improved efficiencies in the department made the post unneeded. He did not elaborate. But in responding to Commissioner Anthony Rinella, who questioned why the position became irrelevant within a year, Butler said there was a specific reason why the position was created, again without elaborating.

"I think you are well aware of that," Butler said to Rinella.

Neither Rinella, Tondini nor Public Health and Safety Commissioner Jay Rix would comment Monday because of the pending complaint.

Hightower said little has changed in the year in manpower that would make the position unnecessary. He argues the position, common at several departments, is needed to act as a liaison between officers and supervisors.

“Our manpower has been the same pretty much since I have been here,” he said. “Things are really a little better. We have more people now than ever.”