

## **Minnesota Coalition of Civil Rights Oppose Minneapolis Mayor R.T.Rybak Budget Cutting**

*By D. Allen, V.P./GM*

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*A coalition of prominent Civil Rights Organizations announces their opposition to Rybak's budget proposal which cuts the entire Complaint Investigation Unit at the City of Minneapolis Civil Rights Department.*

Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak is calling it a "transfer" but this proposal is to cut five full time minority attorney investigators, two contract minority attorney investigators and one supervisor, minority law school graduate of Thurgood Marshall Law School, who has been in the unit for over eight years.

Protection of civil rights within the City of Minneapolis can be traced back to an executive order issued by Mayor Hubert M. Humphrey. In 1967 the Minneapolis Civil Rights Ordinance was passed. In 1974 the investigative powers were strengthened with subpoena power, less than 10 cities have this power with such power in the nation. In 1991 a new section was added to provide for Domestic Partner registration at City Clerk.

"Cutting this unit is discarding decades of civil rights history and ignores the growing need to service Minneapolis' increasingly diverse population," said George Brandon, from the Council of Black Minnesotans. "We cannot stay quiet; citizens of Minneapolis must rally to have their voices heard by contacting the Mayor's office and City Council Persons, because cutting this unit means that it will never come back."

For the first time in the department's history, they have an all minority attorney staff doing this legal work and have closed 100% more cases in 2008 than in 2007. The Complaint Investigations Unit has seen a backlog of cases from its inception, which is a sign of the amount of discrimination complaints that make it through its doors.

There are over 450 open and active cases and it is highly unlikely that the Minnesota State Department of Human Rights can absorb all of these cases as they face cuts also. Additionally, there are jurisdictional and time limits issues which may make transfer of these cases impossible.

"I truly believe the Department's role in investigating and adjudicating complaints affords access to justice for people who otherwise feel they have none," explains Amy Johnson, Executive Director of OutFront Minnesota who served as an attorney Civil Rights Commissioner.

"Investigators can come and go but at the end of the day, it is the people of Minneapolis who will be disenfranchised and their voices will not be heard because Saint Paul is just not as accessible to citizens of Minneapolis like this department is," said Toni Newborn, former President of the Black Law Students Association – William Mitchell College of Law chapter.

The Ways and Means Committee Meeting is on March 2, 2009 at 1:30 PM and full City Council meeting is on March 6, 2009 at 9:30 AM.

Civil Rights Coalition includes: Council on Black Minnesotans, Council on American-Islamic Relations – MN Chapter, Jewish Community Action, MN Dakota Conference NAACP, OutFront Minnesota, and Minneapolis Urban League

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