



“DARKNESS CANNOT DRIVE OUT DARKNESS, ONLY LIGHT CAN DO THAT.”
~ DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

May 6, 2025
Finalized Report Date

Final Report

To: Jordanne Bryan
From: New Light Investigations
Date: 05/06/2025
Assigned Investigator: Jacqueline Manning

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NARRATIVE

Subjects of Investigation: Sallie Lowry

Complainant: Karen Bivens

Department: Recreation Department

Allegations: Harassment, Hostile Workplace, Insubordination

People Interviewed:

1. Karen Bivens, Director of Cultural Affairs & Human Services
2. Sallie Lowry, Recreation Supervisor
3. Nicole Johnson, Recreation Supervisor
4. Town of Hamden Employees, Witnesses (13)

Exhibits:

1. Bivens Complaint (1/23/25)
2. Typed complaints (Johnson and Lowry)
3. HR/Witness #14 Correspondence (2/2025)
4. HR/NLI Correspondence Witness #15 (3/2025)
5. Silverbells After Action Review
6. Recreation Supervisor Job Description
7. Witness #2/Lowry group text
8. Witness #7, photos Senior Luncheon
9. Witness #9 Notes on Bivens
10. Handwritten Journal Entries, Lowry
11. Statements/Character letters Lowry
12. Response to August 16, 2024, write up, Johnson undated
13. Organizational Structure
14. Town of Hamden Discrimination Policy

INCIDENTS LEADING TO INVESTIGATION

COMPLAINT

Karen Bivens is the Director of Cultural Affairs & Human Services for the Town of Hamden. Bivens filed a complaint with Town of Hamden Human Resources on January 23, 2025, alleging that Recreation Department Supervisors Sallie Lowry and her colleague Nicole Johnson have been harassing her with complaints and making disparaging and slanderous statements about her to others. **[Exhibit 1]** Bivens stated that Lowry and Johnson have sowed seeds of conflict in an effort to thwart their work duties and assassinate her character. Bivens stated these behaviors from Lowry and Johnson are interfering with her ability to do her job completely and fully.

COUNTER CLAIMS/COMPLAINTS

Recreation Department Supervisor Sallie Lowry and her colleague Nicole Johnson have filed and/or made numerous complaints against Bivens since 2023, alleging harassment, discrimination, micromanagement, and failure to provide training. **[Exhibit 2 & Appendix C 130-309]**

BACKGROUND:

KAREN BIVENS

Bivens was appointed as Director of Cultural Affairs & Human Services by Hamden Mayor Lauren Garrett in 2022. Bivens is responsible for overseeing multiple departments, including:

- Recreation
- Arts & Culture
- Community Services
- Senior Services

Bivens reports directly to the mayor and serves as the appointing authority for hiring and administrative decisions.

SALLIE LOWRY

Sallie Lowry was hired by the Town of Hamden in 1989.

● Employment History:

- Started as a Housing Resource Officer in 1989.
- Transferred to Traffic Department in 1993, then the Assessor's Office.
- Moved to Youth Services (1996), later returning to Assessor's Office.
- Since 2000, has been in the Recreation Department, first as an Administrative Assistant, later promoted to Recreation Supervisor (2023).

HISTORICAL & CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

DEPARTMENT ORGANIZATION

During this investigation, numerous witnesses who have been employed by the Town of Hamden for many years stated that prior to Bivens being hired as the Director of Cultural Affairs & Human Services, the recreation department supervisors had very little supervision. Historically, the recreation supervisors reported to the Director of Parks Department but operated autonomously.

The two previous recreation supervisors, David Demartino and Laura Luzzi were long-term Town of Hamden employees. Lowry was the Recreation Department's administrative assistant beginning in 2000. Luzzi [REDACTED] died in 2022. Demartino also retired in 2022. This left two open Recreation Supervisor positions to be filled.

Lowry and Johnson both applied for the Recreation Supervisor position. Johnson was chosen over Lowry by Bivens for the first position in February 2023. Lowry applied for the second position and was promoted to Recreation Supervisor by Bivens in March 2023. Lowry continued to handle the administration and received a stipend for a period of time.

This investigation discovered that Bivens has implemented many changes and new initiatives during her tenure. There have been chain of command changes under the new administration, implementation of computerized processes, and protocols and procedures to improve efficiency and accountability. Some longer-term employees are having difficulty transitioning to Bivens' management style and the changes in the workplace.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIONS & OBJECTIVE

This investigation reviewed a copious amount of documentation provided by Hamden Human Resources Department, Karen Bivens, Sallie Lowry, Nicole Johnson, and witnesses.

Additionally, the complainant, Karen Bivens, the accused Sallie Lowry and her colleague Nicole Johnson were interviewed, as well as thirteen employees of the Town of Hamden. Two additional witness interviews were attempted with witnesses #14 and #15, who were non-cooperative with this investigation. **[Exhibits 3 & 4]**

Furthermore, a separate report will be submitted by this agency relative to cross complaints that Lowry and Johnson have filed against Bivens. However, the objective of both investigations was to identify the overarching patterns of behaviors by all of the employees involved, conditions of the working environment in the Recreation Department related to the totality of the complaints and any employee misconduct.

EVIDENCE PRESENTATION

INTERVIEWS

KAREN BIVENS

Date: February 5, 2025 & February 26, 2025

Time: 1pm & 3pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Title: Director Cultural Affairs & Human Services

EXCESSIVE COMPLAINTS

Bivens expressed distress over the egregious number of complaints filed against her by Lowry and Johnson. Bivens stated that she cannot direct, instruct, supervise, correct, or reprimand without facing some kind of backlash.

- **Retirement Comment Incident:** Bivens mentioned that her comment about Lowry retiring in 2022 was a joke that came up in conversation when discussing how tired Bivens was. Bivens said she made an offhanded comment about considering retiring when Lowry retires. However, Lowry turned it into a CHRO complaint, and Bivens did not anticipate such a strong reaction from Lowry.

- **Promotion and Invoice Issue:** After promoting Lowry to Recreation Supervisor in June 2023, Bivens discovered unpaid invoices for porta potties amounting to \$17,000. This issue was time-sensitive due to the fiscal year ending. An argument ensued between Bivens and Lowry. Lowry was also acting as the Administrative Assistant for a stipend. Lowry later filed a harassment complaint against Bivens over this incident. **[Appendix C, 151-154]**
- **Pool Schedule and Complaint:** Bivens faced many issues with Johnson regarding the pool schedule at Hamden High for open swim sessions. Bivens said she told Johnson to build a relationship with Witness #1, but Johnson claimed Witness #1 does not like her. Bivens said lifeguards are supposed to call Johnson or Lowry if they need a replacement. Bivens asked them to take their work phones home on the weekend to check messages for weekend call outs to ensure coverage for Monday's open swim. They filed an MPP complaint against her for this request requesting on-call pay.
 - Bivens has documented the numerous issues she has had with Johnson related to the pool.
- **Silver Bells Event** – Johnson and Lowry filed an MPP complaint after Bivens instructed them to wipe down tables and change tablecloths on December 13, 2024 for an event being put on by the Recreation Department on the following day. They alleged that Bivens instructed them to perform custodial duties.
 - Bivens said she asked Johnson and Lowry to contribute to an after-action review of the Silver Bells event to improve it, and all they wrote was “tablecloths reused/health risk, Risk of communicable disease by reusing disposable table cloths.” **[Exhibit 5]**

COMMUNICATION

Bivens stated communication with Lowry and Johnson is full of strife and back and forth just for her to obtain details from them. They are elusive and vague with information. She has to continually prompt them to provide additional details that she needs to make decisions and approvals. There are constant miscommunications, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations. Bivens said she scrutinizes her emails to make sure she does not offend Johnson and Lowry, and she is spending a lot of unnecessary time double checking and rereading her emails before sending them.

- **Derogatory Comments and Solicitation:** Bivens was upset to learn that Lowry and Johnson referred to her derogatorily behind her back, calling her a slave master and claiming [REDACTED]. She also learned that they solicited camp directors to write statements against her.
- **Disrespect and Performance Issues:** Bivens stated that Lowry and Johnson are extremely disrespectful and not conscientious in their duties. Johnson doodles during meetings, and both resisted new forms and checklists created by Bivens. **[Appendix B]** She finds it challenging to direct them without causing offense.

JOB DUTY ARGUMENTS

Bivens stated that the job description for the Recreation Supervisor needs to be updated. Johnson and Lowry are very literal with it. **[Exhibit 6]** There is a line at the bottom of the job description, which says other duties assigned, but Lowry and Johnson do not see that line. There have been a few times that they have said they do not feel comfortable doing things she has assigned and said

they wanted to call the union. Bivens' response was, "no problem, call the union, we can have a meeting, but in the meantime execute the task."

- **Training and Legacy Programs:** Bivens relied on Lowry's 30 years of experience in the town's Recreation Department. Lowry had claimed to have covered responsibilities during Luzzi's illness. However, after starting the new position, Lowry frequently requested unspecified training. Bivens was puzzled, as many recreation programs were legacy programs that required minimal new tasks, they were "wash, rinse, repeat" programs, and Lowry had many years of experience in the department.
 - "So, I relied on her for summer camp because, as she had said, she covered for Laura often. But then I would start to ask her for things and she'd say, I need training, I need training. And I'd say, well, historically what has happened, right? I'm a new person. So tell me historically what has happened and let's see if we can do that or, you know, if we need a different approach. [She'd say] Well, I don't know because I never actually did that part."
- **Retirement Celebration Incident:** Bivens believed Lowry and Johnson leaked a story about Ranger Vincent Lavorgna's retirement to the press, turning a celebration into a scandal that came to be called "pizzagate" on the Town of Hamden Facebook page. **[Appendix B, 99-112]**
- **Unified Retaliation and Duties:** Bivens described Lowry and Johnson as inseparable. She feels like she only has one recreation supervisor due to their lack of task division and claims of needing to do things together.
- **Summer Camp Incident:** Last year, Lowry's son was involved in an altercation at summer camp. Lowry and Johnson showed up without informing Bivens, who learned about the incident from someone else. This was considered an emergent situation, which both had been instructed to advise her of promptly. This incident was part of a write up that Bivens issued on 8/15/2024, for which Lowry and Johnson filed a grievance. **[Appendix C, 250-253]**
 - Bivens is reluctant to rehire Lowry's grandson because of the incident last year. She fears that Lowry will claim retaliation, when in fact, she is concerned that his behavior was volatile.

ALIENATION FROM OFFICE

Bivens said Johnson and Lowry are so combative towards her that she does not use her office at the Recreation Department. She said she is very uncomfortable and feels the dagger eyes at her. She said she cannot trust the smiles because face to face sometimes things seem fine and then she will be notified by Human Resources that a grievance has been filed. Or she will hear from other people that Lowry and Johnson were talking negatively about her. She said, "I'm, but it's just, it's been very uncomfortable. It's been very, very uncomfortable. You know, like to constantly be accused..."

OTHER EMPLOYEE ISSUES

Bivens said she is having other communications issues and strains in her working relationships with Witness #9 and Witness #14.

- Bivens said that Witness #9, like Lowry and Johnson, is also elusive with information. Bivens stated that Witness #9 is manipulative with the information she provides. Bivens stated that witness #9 has had communication issues with other employees in the town departments, specifically the Town Attorney's Office and Purchasing Department. Bivens

is extra contentious to ask for an elaboration of programming details from witness #9 before the information goes to the other town offices seeking approval.

- Bivens said she is especially disheartened by Witness #14's behavior. She said Witness #14 works closely with Lowry and Johnson, and his disposition has changed towards her drastically. Bivens said Witness #14 was caught engaging in misconduct when he backdated a town notice for a public meeting to make it seem like he had posted notice to the public in the required timeframe under Freedom of Information laws. She stated that he had applied for several full-time positions with the Town of Hamden but either did not pass the civil commission test or was not first rated for the position. Due to his disappointments in being turned down for a full-time position and his close working relationship and camaraderie with Lowry and Johnson, his attitude towards Bivens has soured.

WITNESS #2

Date: February 18, 2025

Time: 4:00 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

POWER STRUGGLE

Witness #2 stated the work climate is bad. There is a clear power struggle between Karen Bivens and Lowry. Lowry has a reputation for running the place for years, and Karen's arrival has caused tension with Lowry. "One of the biggest things was, Ms. Sally used to pretty much even with the other recreational supervisors, she pretty much ran it as far as we know. She was like the boss, the go-to person."

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE

Witness #2 said Lowry and Johnson have a negative view about Bivens, which they air freely. "*You know, pretty much painting a picture of this, if you don't know the person for yourself, it paints a horrible picture for this evil person who's just here to take over and take jobs away from them.*"

He has never witnessed them being directly disrespectful or unprofessional toward Bivens at meetings, but there is body language and clear tension. Witness #2 agreed that Johnson and Lowry are bonded together against Bivens.

INVOLVEMENT OF STAFF IN CONFLICTS

Witness #2 said Lowry and Johnson make many comments about their issues with Bivens and speculations about her motives. He believes that the camp employees do not need to know about or be dragged into conflicts and tensions, which have nothing to do with them and are occurring on a management level. He has heard comments from Recreational Supervisors, Ms. Lowry and Ms. Johnson, indicating that they felt excluded from information and decision-making.

Witness #2 described many of the conflicts as petty and based in the internal power dynamics.

Examples provided:

- Lowry sent the witness a text message in group text with Johnson and witnesses #4, #14 and [REDACTED]. The issue was the new administrative assistant, witnesses [REDACTED] introduced herself as administrator to Karen and not the department. Lowry texted that she was asking the union lawyer Thursday morning. Lowry said witness [REDACTED] wasn't corrected by Karen, who was present, therefore she needs an answer. **[Exhibit 7]**
- Lowry also told the witness that there may come a time when she needs him to write a statement. This was said in the context that Lowry was complaining that certain tasks with her job description were being taken away by Bivens.
- Lowry also approached witness [REDACTED] asked him to write a statement, but he played it off that he was busy and blew off her request.

MISCOMMUNICATION

Witness #2 mentioned that since Karen Bivens became the director, there have been a lot of changes and confusion and miscommunications. Witness #2 highlighted the lack of communication and trust between Bivens, Lowry, and Johnson. This has led to confusion and problems in handling situations.

- There has been confusion over the new digital registration system, and how to handle paper applications.
- There has been confusion and miscommunication over first aid paperwork, which is a safety issue.
- Witness #2 mentioned ongoing issues with camp t-shirts. There were complaints about the sizes and quantity of T-shirts ordered for campers and staff. He said, "We've been complaining for years because our kids never have the appropriate shirts. I'm a male, I have female campers. I don't feel comfortable with these girls walking around with t-shirts that look like dresses on. It almost seems like every project that doesn't get done, the task was given to the recreational supervisors. You call them, 'oh, it's Karen's fault.'"
- Witness #2 recalled an incident involving Lowry's son, who was a camp counselor, handing out tickets for a trip. There were concerns about him performing tasks that should have been handled by supervisors.
- Additionally, there was a verbal altercation with Lowry's son involving him and some CITs that caused conflict.

These conflicts have affected the work environment and staff morale. Two camp directors are not returning this year due to the drama.

BLAME-SHIFTING

Witness #2 indicated that due to the miscommunications between Lowry, Johnson, and Bivens and the issues that arise from the conflicts, Lowry and Johnson will at times attempt to shift the blame for these problems onto the camp directors. "You almost feel like you need to record yourself when you talk to anybody because it's like my words are going to get twisted."

RELATIONSHIP WITH LOWRY

Witness #2 has known Lowry for a long time and is fond of her on a personal level. However, the fear of retaliation from Lowry is a recurring theme. Staff members are afraid to speak out against her due to her influence. He felt Lowry has significant influence.

- [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] had a connection to Lowry, which led to him being disrespectful towards Karen.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

WITNESS #3

Date: February 25, 2025

Time: 4 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- **Pre-Camp Meetings and Preparations:** The witness described a series of monthly pre-camp meetings starting in February, where camp directors, assistant directors, and relevant staff discuss logistics, plan activities, and prepare for the camp season. These meetings are typically held in person in a conference room at the recreation area and are aimed at ensuring everything is in place for the camp, including budgeting, counselor training, and safety protocols.
- **Working Relationship with Sallie Lowry and Nicole Johnson:** The witness explained that his working relationship with Sallie Lowry and Nicole Johnson is generally good. They assist with budgeting, track finances, and help with organizing trips. He perceives their interactions as professional, and despite hearing rumors about possible tension between them and Bivens, he has not personally witnessed any significant conflict. He appreciates their assistance, particularly in maintaining the camp's financials and executing activities.
- **Relationship with Karen Bivens:** The witness described his relationship with Bivens as generally functional, but with some disagreements, primarily around budget issues and the desire to do more for the children. He is an advocate for more activities, like additional trips, and at times, this leads to tension with Bivens, as he pushes for extra funds. However, he emphasized that there has been no disrespect or hostile behavior from Bivens towards him.

- **Alleged Tension Between Lowry, Johnson, and Bivens:** The witness mentioned hearing rumors about Lowry and Johnson not getting along with Bivens, but he has never witnessed direct confrontation. He also mentioned instances where Lowry and Johnson made negative comments about Bivens, particularly regarding financial decisions, but never in an overtly disrespectful or public way. The witness clarified that they did not bad-mouth Bivens to him directly but often speculated on Bivens’ motives regarding funding decisions related to camp activities and trips.

The witness has never heard either refer to Bivens as a slave master or call her racist. He said they would not make that kind of remark around him.

- **Request to Join a Complaint Against Bivens:** On a few occasions, Lowry and Johnson have approached the witness to ask if he would support filing a complaint against Bivens, but the witness did not engage in this. He stressed that he has always prioritized doing the best for the kids and that he has never felt compelled to participate in any negative action against Bivens. Despite his awareness of underlying tensions, he chooses to focus on [REDACTED] effectively for the children.
- **Request to Write a Negative Statement:** Lowry asked the witness to write a statement detailing irregularities related to the camp, particularly regarding the camp’s operations and financial management. However, the witness refused to write anything negative. He emphasized that he believes in taking responsibility for mistakes made under his watch and is committed to addressing issues directly rather than blaming others.

WITNESS #4

Date: February 20, 2025

Time: 1:30 pm

Location: Helen Street School Conference Room

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- [REDACTED]
- The camp is situated outside of the Hamden High School gym, and the primary focus is on ensuring the children have fun and safe experiences.
- Witness #4 works closely with Lowry and Johnson [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Bivens, the director, approves [REDACTED]

INTERACTIONS WITH BIVENS, LOWRY, AND JOHNSON

- Witness has a good working relationship with all three individuals: Bivens, Lowry, and Johnson. She has no complaints about any of them.
- She has no issues with Bivens and views her always being very professional. There are no complaints about Bivens from either Lowry or Johnson, and Bivens has never spoken poorly of Lowry or Johnson.
- She does not witness the interactions between Bivens, Lowry, and Johnson, and is primarily at the camp and not in the office where these interactions may occur.
- The witness does not get involved in any drama or negative interactions and is focused on her responsibilities with the camp.

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT

- The witness described the meetings related to the camp as professional with everyone behaving appropriately and cooperatively.
- Witness has never witnessed unprofessional behavior from Bivens during meetings.
- While Lowry and Johnson assist with [REDACTED], the witness does not see any tension or issues between them and Bivens.

PERSONAL PHILOSOPHY

- Witness #4 described herself as a “people person” who tries to get along with everyone and treats people the way they would like to be treated. The witness believes this approach helps her avoid conflicts in the workplace.

WITNESS #5

Date: February 14, 2025
Time: 1:30 pm
Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room
Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

- **Workplace Tension and Interpersonal Conflicts:** There is noticeable tension between Bivens, Lowry, and Johnson, though it is more subtle than overt conflict. These tensions manifest in the form of misunderstandings and communication issues, especially in meetings. The witness reported that the tensions have not escalated into open disputes in front of him. The workplace atmosphere is described as mild compared to previous experiences the witness has had in other jobs.

- **Complaints and Negative Comments:** Lowry and Johnson have both made derogatory comments about Bivens to the witness. They used terms like the "B-word," which the witness interpreted as "venting." The witness did not feel pressured to agree with or align with their views but listened without directly engaging in the negativity. The witness did not feel that he was being dragged into any conflict or encouraged to take sides.
- **Lack of Direct Conflict with Bivens:** The witness has had no issues or complaints about working with Bivens. His interactions have been described as professional, and he feels that as long as work is completed and no complaints are received, there is no problem. There have been no unreasonable or unprofessional behaviors from Bivens that the witness has observed or experienced.
- **Infrequent and Collaborative Interaction with Lowry and Johnson:** The witness does not have frequent interactions with Lowry and Johnson but has worked with them on certain events, such as the summer camp program and the fall festival. Witness #5 generally gets along with both, with Lowry assisting with financial matters and Johnson helping on logistics for events. However, these interactions are not frequent enough to indicate significant collaboration or conflict.
- **Job Flexibility and Perceived Tension:** The witness's role involves some flexibility, such as working on [REDACTED] which has caused some potential tension with Johnson and Lowry. There seems to be some jealousy or misunderstanding regarding the flexibility of witness #5's job, with others possibly perceiving it as a perk without recognizing the responsibility that comes with it. However, the witness did not indicate that this caused any major conflicts.
- **Racial Dynamics and Misunderstandings:** There have been concerns raised by Lowry and Johnson about being treated differently because they are Black women. However, the witness found it difficult to understand how race plays a role in the tension, especially considering that Bivens, their supervisor, is Southeast Asian. He also believes that she is married to a Black man. The witness felt that Lowry's frustrations might stem from experiences outside of the workplace, and he believes it is unfair to attribute all tensions to racial bias.

WITNESS #6

Date: February 14, 2025

Time: 3:45 pm

Location: Telephone Interview

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

- **Unclear Roles and Responsibilities:** There was a lack of clarity and accountability in the department before Bivens came in, with some staff members not doing their jobs or being absent without consequence.

- **Resistance to Change:** When Bivens began taking on a more leadership-oriented role, asking people to follow through on tasks and managing their responsibilities, some employees (Lowry and Johnson) resisted. This has led to friction within the team and a more hostile environment.
- **Lowry and Johnson's Behavior:** There was a pattern of Lowry and Johnson not following through on tasks, such as ordering shirts or contacting the right people about logistics (e.g., soccer teams using the park). Their behavior was seen as disrespectful, and Witness #6 mentioned feeling frustrated by their lack of accountability.
- **Johnson's Doodling and Distractions:** Witness #6 observed that Johnson often doodled or was distracted during meetings, even when asked by Bivens to pay attention. This was seen as unprofessional and disrespectful, though Bivens tried to redirect Johnson's behavior without confrontation. *"Whether it's a habit or quirk or whatever Nicole doodles and she's always on her phone. When she gives a report to the boss she will actually turn her back on the boss and mumble and doodle and on her phone when she's giving a report. And when somebody else is giving a report she just totally puts her head down and just doodles. So she's not paying attention to what else is going on in the meeting. And a couple instances I do remember Karen saying 'can you please stop doodling and get off your phone and pay attention to what's going on in the meeting'. Nicole would say 'well this is the way I am and this is what I do' and go back and doodle."*
- **The T-shirt Incident:** Witness #6 also stated that the ordering of T-shirts was discussed during an interdepartmental staff meeting. He said the color was discussed to be Town of Hamden green and that Nicole and Sallie would order staff shirts for everyone. He said when the T-shirts came in, Nicole and Sallie had pink and purple collared T-shirts, and they only ordered T-shirts for the kids. They responded that they only ordered the staff shirts for themselves and not for the rest of the staff. Witness #6 said Bivens told them to order t-shirts for the staff and ask their sizes. They did not ask witness #6 his size during the meeting, and Johnson told Bivens that he was a temporary employee and did not need a shirt. Witness #6 stated that even after this meeting, Johnson and Lowry still did not order the shirts for the staff.
- **Personal Frustrations and Friendship:** Witness #6 expressed personal frustrations with both Lowry and Johnson but also noted that they were once friends, which made the situation more difficult. Despite these personal connections, witness #6 felt that the work environment had become toxic, with Lowry and Johnson contributing to a negative atmosphere.
- **Lowry's Retirement and Sensitive Topics:** The conversation about Lowry's retirement was a sensitive subject, and Bivens' comment about when Lowry was planning to retire may have been the tipping point that escalated the negativity and tension in the department.
- **Frustration with the Work Environment:** Overall, witness #6 described the work environment as one where the staff, particularly Lowry and Johnson, were not doing their jobs despite being competent individuals. *"I didn't think Nicole in the very beginning was doing it on purpose...I would come home very frustrated, (and say to my wife) either (they are) incompetent or doing it on purpose... That was my perspective... and I know they weren't*

incompetent. They are two very strong very smart women individuals I should say, they are totally capable of doing their job. And for some reason they weren't."

- **Management and Accountability:** Bivens had difficulty enforcing expectations, as evidenced by Lowry and Johnson repeatedly failing to complete their tasks. Even when Bivens clearly communicated what was expected, there was resistance or negligence in carrying out tasks. This created frustration and contributed to a hostile work environment. Witness #6 described Lowry and Johnson as manipulating situations to avoid accountability. This lack of cooperation and failure to align with management expectations creates tension and negatively impacts the work environment.
- [REDACTED]
- **Overworked Management:** The witness discussed Bivens' overloaded role, where she was asked to take on responsibilities that were meant for other individuals, such as payroll and bill payments. This led to a situation where tasks were not being completed unless Bivens did them herself, which further strained her. He said Bivens' plate is "overloaded."
- **Work Environment Shift:** The witness described a shift in the workplace atmosphere when Johnson and Lowry became supervisors, feeling that the environment became hostile and unrecognizable compared to the friendly interactions they experienced when they were just colleagues.
- **Frustration and Tension:** The witness pointed out that one of their colleagues, witness #14, is often caught in the middle of the tension in the office and is on the verge of "exploding." Witness #14 is a part-time employee who manages logistics for the food trucks used for events at the park but has become increasingly frustrated with the internal dynamics. The witness said that sometimes witness #14 takes Johnson and Lowry's side and other times he takes the side he feels is right.
- **Closing the Door on the Past:** Towards the end, the witness expressed a desire to move past the situation, trying to erase the negative experiences from his mind.

WITNESS #7

Date: February 18, 2025

Time: 11 am

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

WITNESS ROLE

- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] There is a collaborative approach that is necessary to organizing events, with cross-departmental efforts to ensure proper set-up and execution. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

WORKPLACE TENSIONS

- Bivens’ management style is described as supportive, but some employees resist her efforts to enforce a structured hierarchy and greater accountability in the workplace. This resistance has become a source of tension in meetings and with events with Lowry, Johnson and witnesses #9 and #14.
- The witness believes that push backs against Bivens’ leadership stem from Bivens’ attempts to impose order, accountability and discipline, which some employees find challenging or unnecessary.
- Witness #7 described tensions during weekly [REDACTED] as particularly uncomfortable and hostile.
- Johnson gives “snippy” one-word answers to Bivens during meetings.
- Meetings are not productive because of Lowry’s and Johnson’s argumentative disposition towards Bivens
- There is a constant back and forth; a tug of war with Lowry, Johnson, and Witness #9.
- Lowry and Johnson have shown reluctance to carry out duties outside of their perceived roles, leading to a lack of cooperation.

- It is very hard to collaborate under these conditions.

HOSTILITY TOWARDS BIVENS AND THE “ANTI-BIVENS CLUB”

- It is 2 against 1, with Lowry and Johnson against Bivens.
- Lowry and Johnson have looped witness #14 into hostility, insinuating that he has not been hired for the full-time position he applied for because of Bivens.
- [REDACTED] Bivens does not work out of the Recreation Office because of the combined hostility towards her.
- The witness called the group a “threesome” of negativity.
- The witness understands why Bivens does not want to be alone with Johnson, Lowry, and Witness #14 because they “make stuff up.”
- Witness #9 also actively resists Bivens’ leadership and instructions.
- The witness said these employees are forming an “anti-Karen club.”
- The resistance towards Bivens seems largely due to her changes in programming and management and that she holds employees accountable.
- These employees are hostile towards Bivens and resist following her instructions.
- There are a litany of ongoing complaints, spiraling, and it is “exhausting.”

SILVER BELLS EVENT & MMP HEARING

- [REDACTED] the day prior to the Silver Bells event hosted by the Recreation Department.
- The events are held back-to-back and the departments use the same decoration themes so as to optimize resources.
- The [REDACTED] was held from 11am-3pm and hosted 150 people.
- Following the event, Lowry and Johnson came to the Cultural Center at approximately 3:30 pm to make sure the Silver Bells Event was ready for the following day.
- The custodians set up the tables and chairs for the [REDACTED], and the set up was the same for the Silver Bells event.
- There were a few tablecloths from the previous event that needed to be replaced.
- The [REDACTED] Bivens brought wipes for a few of the tables.
- Bivens told Johnson and Lowry that they could wipe down a few of the tablecloths that were not too soiled and replace the ones that were.
- This request turned into a grievance with Johnson and Lowry arguing that wiping the tables was the custodian’s job.

- [REDACTED]

o [REDACTED]

0

- [REDACTED]
- Johnson implied that witness #13 was filing a grievance over the incident.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] Johnson claimed that there were 30 tablecloths to change. There were not even 30 tables
- [REDACTED] Johnson three silver and three gold to replace after the previous event.
- The witness provided pictures of the set up for this investigation. **[Exhibit 8]**
- [REDACTED]

ACCUSATIONS OF RACISM AGAINST BIVENS

- Lowry accused Bivens of racism, but Witness #7 strongly disagrees with this accusation, highlighting Bivens’ support for diversity and inclusion.
- Witness #7 defended Bivens by citing her support for initiatives like Black History Month, LGBTQ+ programming, and her work with diverse communities.
- [REDACTED].
- Bivens has worked to make senior programming more inclusive, introducing new activities to appeal to a broader range of residents, such as multicultural events and classes.
- The changes were seen as beneficial, helping to diversify the senior center programming and make it more inclusive for people from different backgrounds.
- Witness #7 highlighted Bivens’ support for LGBTQ+ programming, mentioning her involvement in the Hamden Pride Committee and her support for LGBTQ+ events at the senior center.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

WITNESS #8

Date: February 5, 2025

Time: 10am

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jaqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

LONG-STANDING GRIEVANCES FROM LOWRY

- [REDACTED]
- Lowry, who has worked for the Town of Hamden since 2000, has felt overlooked for many years, [REDACTED]. She became particularly upset when Johnson was chosen for a supervisor position in 2023 instead of her, even though Lowry had been performing many of the supervisor’s duties while the previous supervisor was out due to illness. [REDACTED]. She had mainly been handling administrative tasks such as payroll, assigning people to events, and collecting time sheets. Lowry’s frustration escalated when Johnson, who had worked as an administrative assistant and managed elderly outreach programs, took on the supervisor role. Witness #8 observed that Lowry and Johnson formed a close alliance, staying together in adjoining offices at Town Hall.

JOHNSON’S TRANSITION AND BEHAVIOR

- Johnson, initially hired at Elderly Services with no prior issues, underwent a dramatic behavioral change after transferring to the Recreation Department in 2023. Witness #8 noted that Johnson, initially soft-spoken, became increasingly argumentative and insubordinate. This transformation is believed to be influenced by Lowry, with Johnson becoming confrontational and resistant to authority. In contrast to her earlier demeanor, Johnson’s behavior became increasingly difficult for Director Bivens to manage.

ABSENCE AND INTRODUCTION OF A RECREATION DIRECTOR

- For 15-17 years, the Recreation Department lacked a dedicated director, complicating management and supervision. When Director Bivens was appointed by Mayor Lauren Garrett, she was given oversight of multiple departments—Recreation, Elderly Services, Youth Services, and Community Services. This broad responsibility made it challenging for Bivens to effectively manage each department, particularly given the ongoing tensions with Lowry and Johnson. The lack of direct supervision for many years had allowed Lowry and Johnson to act without accountability, exacerbating the issues when Bivens assumed leadership.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND STAFF DYNAMICS

- Witness #8 compared Lowry and Johnson’s behavior to that of their predecessors, Laura Luzzi and Dave Demartino, who were described as committed and cooperative in their roles. In contrast, Lowry became more combative after Johnson’s arrival in the Recreation Department. This shift in dynamics worsened under Bivens’ leadership, as the lack of direct supervision for many years allowed Lowry and Johnson to resist authority without consequence.

HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT

- [REDACTED] described the work environment created by Lowry and Johnson as hostile. As a result, Bivens preferred to work from her office at the Keefe Center, away from the constant tensions.

SILVER BELLS EVENT DISPUTE

- A major dispute between Lowry and Johnson occurred during the 2024 Silver Bells event, when both refused to clean tables and replace tablecloths. They argued that such tasks were custodial work, not part of their job duties. [REDACTED] cleaning and replacing tablecloths were standard event responsibilities for the supervisors. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] the state representative from the Labor Department dismissing the case, labeling it as frivolous.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT FAILURES

- Both Lowry and Johnson failed to manage several critical tasks. For example, Lowry’s son was tasked with delivering all summer camp tickets to one site, which caused chaos when the tickets were not properly separated and distributed for each camp. Additionally, they both refused to oversee major events such as the Fall Festival, despite being offered overtime pay for the weekend event. This refusal placed additional burdens on other employees, who had to step in and take on extra responsibilities. Furthermore, Johnson has neglected responsibilities in overseeing the pool, and her failure to verify timesheets led to lifeguards not being paid.

RESISTANCE TO DIRECTIVES

- Lowry and Johnson consistently resisted Director Bivens' directives, which created ongoing tension. One of the key disputes involved Bivens asking them to take their work phones home to be available for emergency staffing issues, particularly due to a shortage of lifeguards. However, Johnson did not have her phone, which meant she could not find a replacement when needed. Both employees insisted on receiving standby pay if they were required to bring their phones home, leading to another MPP complaint.

FREQUENT COMPLAINTS AND UNION INVOLVEMENT

- Lowry and Johnson filed numerous complaints about minor issues, such as Bivens using a red marker on a whiteboard, which Johnson claimed was embarrassing. These constant complaints detracted from their actual job duties. Despite their grievances, Bivens continued to make efforts to manage the department, but Lowry and Johnson's actions often undermined her leadership.

INTERPERSONAL TENSIONS

- The tension between Lowry, Johnson, and others was not only professional but also personal.

[REDACTED]

DISCRIMINATION COMPLAINTS

- Witness #8 also addressed the complaints Lowry and Johnson had about feeling discriminated against due to their race, especially Lowry. He suggested that Lowry had [REDACTED] for Johnson, causing her to follow suit in making discrimination complaints. Witness #8 shared that Lowry had filed numerous complaints over the years, but in the past, they had been able to work through issues.

LEADERSHIP AND ROLE CLARITY CHALLENGES

- Director Bivens faced significant challenges due to the broad scope of her responsibilities and the unclear roles of Lowry and Johnson. They resisted attending field visits and refused to oversee important programs and camps, which further complicated management. Witness #8 noted that Bivens tried to clarify the expectations for Lowry and Johnson, but they continued to defy her authority and reject the direction she provided. Their reluctance to cooperate added to the confusion regarding their roles and responsibilities.

ATTEMPTED MEDIATION

- [REDACTED] Johnson refused to participate in mediation without her union [REDACTED]

representative. The witness told her that there was no disciplinary action involved, that mediation is an effort to talk through issues.

LACK OF JOB APPRECIATION

- Witness #8 remarked that being a recreation supervisor was a great job with significant pay and benefits, potentially one of the second-highest paying roles in the Recreation Department. However, Lowry and Johnson continued to focus on complaints rather than appreciating the opportunities they had. Witness #8 commented that the time spent on writing complaints could have been better spent performing their actual job duties.

SYMPATHY FOR BIVENS

- Witness #8 expressed sympathy for Bivens, recognizing the difficulty of managing a department where Lowry and Johnson's insubordination and frequent complaints continuously undermined her efforts.

WITNESS #9

Date: February 25, 2025

Time: 12 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jaqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

STRAINED RELATIONSHIP WITH BIVENS

- The witness has a strained relationship with Bivens
- "I have been keeping notes since Karen Bivens started [REDACTED] When I saw that there was a pattern of micromanaging and disrespecting and lying and a number of other issues, I started to keep track of everything." **[Exhibit 9]**
- The witness said none of the incidents rose to level of grievance. She called it "death by a thousand cuts."
- She said many of the incidents are flying just under the radar of being grievable but add up to a toxic work environment.
- She said if you look at each incident alone, they don't seem so bad, but when you put them all together there is a pattern.
- The witness filed a complaint with Human Resources against Bivens which resulted in mediation with Union Representative Liz Ditman.

- Following the mediation, Bivens said she was beginning progressive discipline against the witness for sending too many emails.

CONFUSION IN CHAIN OF COMMAND

- There has been confusion for the witness in the chain of command since Bivens started.
- [REDACTED]
- The administration is a little more controlling.
- The new mayor, Lauren, has several appointees, Bivens as one of them who have been inserted into the chain of command.
- **Supervisory Confusion:** With the introduction of new leadership, confusion about the chain of command has compounded the existing problems. When there is a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, it can create inefficiencies and misalignment within teams.
- **Micromanagement & Communication Delays:** The lack of timely responses to basic work requests, such as vacation or funding inquiries, by Bivens has led to frustration.
 - Micromanagement and delays in communication can significantly undermine employee morale, productivity, and trust in leadership.
- **Management and Funding Challenges:** [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] This inconsistency can breed distrust in management and create confusion about priorities.
- **Overtime and Event Restrictions:** Despite having proper budget allocations, the witness is prevented from attending events or claiming overtime, limiting her ability to perform her job and engage with the community. This restriction can cause frustration, particularly if it undermines responsibilities that were originally part of the role.
 - The witness made a list of events and overtime opportunities that have been taken away from her by Bivens.
- **Criticism Without Guidance:** Bivens' criticism without offering constructive feedback makes it difficult for employees to understand how to improve. This creates a frustrating work environment where employees feel unsupported and unclear about expectations.
- **Budget Control and Confusion:** [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] but Bivens' involvement in making changes causes confusion and inefficiency.
- **Inconsistent Approval for Time Off:** The delays in approving vacation or overtime requests, and the need for constant reminders, suggest a lack of respect for employees' time and responsibilities. This adds unnecessary stress and leads to burnout.
- **Program and Event Mismanagement:** [REDACTED] despite being very close to meeting the required number of participants, indicates poor decision-making by Bivens. These kinds of decisions not only disrupt the team's work but also damage morale and community engagement efforts.

- **Unclear Supervision and Oversight:** The fact that other staff (like college fellows) report to Bivens rather than the witness creates role confusion. Clear oversight is crucial to ensure accountability and prevent misunderstandings about job responsibilities.
- **Dismissive Attitudes Toward Staff:** Bivens' dismissive tone experienced by employees like Lowry, indicates an overall lack of respect for long-serving staff. Experienced workers feel undervalued, leading to resentments and loss of institutional knowledge.
 - Bivens has a divide and conquer mentality.
 - Instead of bringing people together she is driving a wedge between them.
 - Lowry and Johnson wanted to join the UPSEU Supervisors Union, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Bivens actively opposed this.
 - When the witness showed up to the MPP hearing regarding Johnson and Lowry's request to join the supervisor's union, the town attorney said she could not be there, but Bivens was there and was allowed to stay.
- **Racial Sensitivity Incident:** The witness alleges that Bivens mishandled a potentially racist comment that was reported to her. She said that a Chinese work study student with her division overheard two other employees talking and one said that he hoped that they did not hire the Indian. The witness reported and followed up on this complaint with Bivens, but Bivens minimized it.
 - She said it can create a toxic work environment where employees feel unsafe or unsupported.
- **Lack of Collaboration:** The witness claimed she is excluded from key meetings and decisions, particularly [REDACTED] and that reflects poor collaboration and decision-making. Not involving all relevant stakeholders can lead to ill-informed decisions and missed opportunities.
- **General Atmosphere of Division:** The "divide and conquer" mentality mentioned by the witness speaks to a broader issue of poor morale and a lack of unity within the team. When staff feel divided and unsupported, it significantly impacts overall performance and enthusiasm.

WITNESS #10

Date: February 14, 2025

Time: 1:30 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

WITNESS ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

WITNESS #11

Date: February 26, 2025

Time: 10:30 am

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jaqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

ROLE AND INVOLVEMENT

- [REDACTED], primarily attending meetings and helping with fundraising, but did not work the event itself.
- The witness mentioned minimal interaction with Johnson and Lowry, mostly involving helping with event setup, [REDACTED].

PERCEPTIONS OF JOHNSON, LOWRY, AND DIRECTOR BIVENS

- The witness spoke about collaboration with Johnson and Lowry [REDACTED]. "They made it seem like they were given a very minuscule budget. The way they talked about it made it seem like they were set up for failure. As time went on, I attended other meetings. I was getting additional feedback. I realized that wasn't it."
- After responsibilities were doled out, and the witness had shared ideas with Bivens, who said there was funding for those ideas, she realized that there was more funding than they led her to believe.
- Witness #11 felt that Johnson and Lowry were not forthcoming about the funds and that their narrative about the director was misleading.
- Witness #11 also indicated that while Johnson and Lowry spoke negatively about Bivens, they did not accuse her of being racist or ageist, but rather criticized her for not being truthful, suggesting that Bivens would "smile in your face and then stab you in the back."
- The witness disagreed with these characterizations, noting that Bivens was supportive and communicative, and encourages ideas from staff.

WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH BIVENS

- Witness #11 emphasized a healthy, open relationship with Bivens, describing her as supportive and engaged [REDACTED].
- Bivens was described as open to new ideas, asking for feedback after training, and encouraging staff to find things to do if they have downtime.
- The witness expressed that Bivens is approachable and receptive, contrasting with the negative perceptions held by Johnson and Lowry.
- The witness viewed Johnson and Lowry as cordial, but did not share their perspective on Bivens. The witness made it clear that she maintains a separate relationship with the director and does not engage in negative conversations about her.
- Witness #11 expressed the ability to separate her own relationships from those of her colleagues, asserting that it is okay to like someone that others may not like.

WORK ENVIRONMENT AND TEAMWORK

- Witness #11 described a positive work environment where she and coworkers pitch in to help with events, even if those events are outside their usual responsibilities or even their department.
- Witness #11 noted she and her colleagues will help with recreation events, just to pitch in, but Johnson and Lowry do not return the same assistance. *“I don't think they see the concept of teamwork.”*

WITNESS #12

Date: March 12, 2025

Time: 1:45 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jaqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

WITNESS ROLE AND RELATIONSHIP WITH BIVENS

- The witness has been in her role for [REDACTED].
- She works well with Bivens, following instructions and collaborating effectively.
- The witness feels comfortable approaching Bivens, making suggestions to improve efficiency.

TEAM DYNAMICS AND TENSIONS

- The witness noticed the tension in the department from day one of her employment.

- The witness noted significant tension in team meetings, where Bivens' instructions are always questioned. The witness said everything is questioned even when it does not need to be, mostly by Lowry and Johnson.
- The witness observed that Lowry and Johnson frequently do not do what Biven asks them to, do not complete tasks as Bivens instructs, or reluctantly perform tasks.
- The witness gave an example that Bivens asked Johnson and Lowry [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- Lowry and Johnson have an extremely negative attitude towards Bivens.
- Lowry and Johnson are very critical of Bivens.
- There is constant back and forth regarding requests and directives.
- Lowry and Johnson are frequently uncooperative with Bivens. It is not constant but is prevalent.
- An incident recently occurred where Johnson was laughing during a meeting. Bivens questioned whether she had said something funny. Johnson said “no” and continued to laugh, which led to Bivens reprimanding her for disrespect, causing an awkward atmosphere.
- Bivens’ authority seems undermined subtly in team interactions, with employees occasionally disregarding her instructions, contributing to friction in the office.
- Bivens leadership style is perceived by Lowry and Johnson as controlling, leading to resistance and reluctance to following her directives.
- The witness described the hostility and questioning as a pattern that creates tension and undermines Bivens’ leadership as the Director.

OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

- Lowry and Johnson are not openly hostile to Bivens but are very critical in private conversations and remarks.
- Lowry and Johnson seem genuinely grateful that the witness is there and helping.
- The witness will believe that everything is good and understood, and the next thing she knows the union is at the office meeting with Lowry and Johnson.
- [REDACTED] The back and forth with Lowry, Johnson, the Director, and the union is surprising. “Every little thing is a complaint. Everything is escalated.”
- Their strained relationship with Bivens is difficult for the witness to understand. Lowry and Johnson do not attempt to have simple conversations to clear up issues.
- Lowry and Johnson have not overtly called the director names in front of the witness.
- Lowry did refer to Bivens as "crazy" following an incident where Bivens was upset by the team not following instructions on providing specific information.
- Lowry will say things like, [REDACTED]

- The witness suggested [REDACTED]
- Lowry's general attitude when it comes to the witness [REDACTED]
- Lowry has said that they are all family, and they have to look out for each other.

LOWRY'S FORMER ROLE

- [REDACTED]
- While the witness is grateful that Lowry has long-term departmental [REDACTED] Lowry is resistant to changes and new initiatives and methods.
- Many of the ways that Lowry is used to performing the administrative tasks are not necessarily efficient and/or secure. An example is the distribution of paychecks for the Camp Directors. Lowry is used to keeping the checks on her door, but that is not secure.
- [REDACTED] and has been keeping the checks in a locked drawer.
- Lowry shows resistance to relinquishing control over certain tasks, [REDACTED]
- This resistance appears to stem from a sense of territoriality as Lowry clings to practices and tasks from her previous role.
- The witness shared an incident when she first started and introduced herself as "Karen's Administrative Assistant." Lowry jumped in and said, "What is your role?" This caused the witness to feel uncomfortable.
- Lowry's long tenure with the department may be contributing to her resistance to change, especially with the introduction of new leadership and younger colleagues taking on new responsibilities.
- The witness suggested that Lowry might be struggling with these changes, which could be affecting her willingness to adapt to new processes or leadership styles.

BIVENS' FRUSTRATION AND AMBIVALENCE

- Bivens is seen as frustrated when team members, particularly Johnson, engage in behavior that challenges her authority or is seen as disrespectful (e.g., laughing without explanation during meetings).
- The witness observed that Bivens is "walking on eggshells," uncertain about the reception she will receive from the team on a daily basis. She said that Bivens is clearly on edge every time she walks through the door of the Recreation Department. The witness can see the apprehension on Bivens' face. She said, "It's hard to watch."

BIVENS' PROFESSIONALISM

- Despite the tension, Bivens is generally respectful and approachable in her professional demeanor, maintaining a level of professionalism that contrasts with Lowry and Johnson's more negative attitudes.

WORKPLACE CULTURE

- The overall workplace culture is seen as negative and defensive, with poor communication and reluctance to address issues directly or in a healthy way with Bivens.
- The witness suggested that a more open and cooperative approach to communication by Lowry and Johnson could improve the work environment.
- [REDACTED] the witness tries to remain neutral but has attempted to suggest solutions, such as a backup plan for electronic registration, only to be dismissed or met with sarcasm.

WITNESS #13

Date: March 12, 2025

Time: 3:45 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Witness Role: [REDACTED]

SILVER BELLS EVENT SETUP AND CLEANUP

- **Job Duties:** [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- **Interaction with Lowry and Johnson:** During the Silver Bells event, Lowry and Johnson offered to help with the cleanup. However, they both expressed that wiping down the tables was not part of their job, despite it being a relatively minor task. The witness observed them "carrying on" about the task. He said, "they just, they made it seem that it was like Karen asked them to build the Taj Mahal." Lowry and Johnson exaggerated their frustration, making the task seem unreasonable. The witness heard them making negative comments about Bivens, although he tried to stay out of the drama.
- **Further Observations:** [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

ONGOING TENSION AND NEGATIVE COMMENTS

- **Changes in Johnson’s Attitude:** The witness observed a change in Johnson's attitude after she moved to the Recreation Department. Initially cooperative and friendly, Johnson became disgruntled and developed a more negative outlook toward Bivens. The witness attributed this change to Lowry’s influence, suggesting that Lowry played a role in escalating minor issues and encouraging Johnson to adopt a more hostile stance toward Bivens.
- **Tension Between Lowry and Bivens:** The witness pointed out that there was existing tension between Lowry and Bivens even before Johnson arrived at the department. This tension stemmed from Bivens trying to implement improvements in the department, which Lowry may have perceived as a threat, leading to resentment.
- **Bivens’ Leadership:** The witness expressed a positive view of Bivens’ leadership, noting improvements in the department under her guidance. Specifically, he mentioned better program participation and more community engagement.
- [REDACTED]
- **Derogatory Language:** The witness reported frequent negative comments from Lowry and Johnson about Bivens. [REDACTED] the witness has overheard Lowry and Johnson calling Bivens derogatory names like “asshole,” “bitch,” “fat bitch,” and “whore.” The conversations between Johnson and Lowry sometimes escalated into discussions about them “doing something about it.”
- The witness mentioned hearing Lowry and Johnson refer to Bivens as “The Master” or simply “Master.” The witness expressed discomfort with these remarks, making it clear that he did not agree with such negative opinions about Bivens.

SALLIE LOWRY

Date: March 20, 2025

Time: 1pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall, 1st Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jaqueline Manning

Present: Dan Bonfiglio, UPSEU Union Representative, Shafiq Abdussabar NLI

Title: Recreation Supervisor

Gender/Race: Female, Black

Note: Lowry was also interviewed on February 20, 2025, by Investigator Shafiq Abdussabar. During that interview, Lowry expressed that two incidents with Bivens from 2022 were never resolved.

2022 INCIDENTS

- **October 17, 2022:** The Director asked Lowry about her retirement plans, which was perceived as inappropriate and ageist. *“Her statement to me verbatim, ‘I know that you don't like to talk about the R-word. When are you retiring?’ That was it with me.”*
- **November 20, 2022:** The Director requested Lowry’s key to the office after Bivens found her office door unlocked in the morning, which she found disrespectful and racist. *“Karen came in my office door, and she asked me for my key because her office was found open. And there were several other people in the office. She wanted to see whether my key would fit her door. She didn't ask no one but me. I would not go in her office or anybody else's office without permission. As a matter of fact, when I first came to this building in 2000, I asked not to have a master key, because brown people are looked on totally different than anybody else. I was the only person, and I'm still hurting from it, that she asked for the key to see whether it unlocked her door. She found out it did not unlock her door.”*
- Lowry provided notes from her handwritten journal regarding her interactions with Bivens. **[Exhibit 10]** Lowry also provided an 11-page typed document that she and Johnson worked together to compose complaints from October 2022 through February 2025. **[Exhibit 2]**

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL TOLL

- Lowry is aggravated and tired, [REDACTED] due to prolonged workplace stress caused by her conflicts with Bivens.
- Lowry is upset about the way that Bivens speaks to her. *“The way she talks to you, she talks to you like you're a kid. Very disrespectful.”*

AUGUST 2024 WRITE-UP INCIDENTS

- The investigator reviewed the August 16, 2024 write up Lowry received from Bivens. **[Appendix C, 252-253]**
- **Camp Altercation:** Lowry learned of her grandson Lamont’s verbal altercation during a basketball game at the camp from Assistant Camp Director Cameron Tyson. Lowry believes it was the camp director’s duty to report the incident to Bivens. Lowry stated that she did not even know there was a basketball game going on.
- **Ticket Delivery:** Lowry and Johnson tasked Lowry’s grandson Lamont and another camp counselor Aiden Goff with delivering the Lake Compounce tickets to the Camp Director, witness #2. Lamont and Aiden were at the Recreation Department picking up tee shirts. Witness #2 was contacted and advised that Lamont and Aiden were delivering the tickets.
- **Timesheet Dispute:** Lowry signed a timesheet under duress after Karen demanded a format change for her 40-hour week (including 5 flex hours), causing confusion over her 8-to-5 schedule with lunch. Lowry said the changes in her working hours and protocols for submitting time were confusing to her.

SILVER BELLS EVENT CONFLICT

- Bivens asked Lowry and Johnson to clean tables at the Silver Bells event, which Lowry saw as custodial work, not supervisory duty. She cleaned/changed many tablecloths (around 20) due to hygiene concerns, and questioned the absent custodian's role. She stated that she was "not a maid."

BIVENS' DISRESPECTFUL MANAGEMENT STYLE

- Lowry said Bivens' communications are condescending, talking down to her like a child, correcting her publicly (e.g., during a staff meeting over a chart), and blocking doorways.
- Lowry referenced an incident that Johnson reported to her on March 18, 2025. Johnson was leaving early, and Bivens was arguing with her about when she could take her lunch break. Johnson went to personnel (HR), and Bivens reportedly followed her. Lowry said that it is intimidation and she would have called the police on Bivens.

LACK OF TRAINING

- Lowry feels untrained for new tasks (e.g., MyRrec software). She is frustrated by Bivens' ineffective, unprofessional training approach. Lowry is a visual learner and wants someone qualified to train her on the new software.

PERCEPTION OF BIVENS

- Lowry likes Bivens personally (e.g., her hair, fun nature, diverse programming) but dislikes her behavior. Lowry called Bivens "Slave Master" for treating her as unintelligent. Lowry said Bivens' treatment is rooted in racial and age-based prejudice.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Lowry believes removing recreation from Bivens' oversight (one of six departments) is the only fix, as Bivens is overburdened, and her stressed state hinders success.
- HR talks (since October 2022) have failed.
- Lowry said the relationship has deteriorated to a degree that is past the point of talking

WORKPLACE DYNAMICS

- Lowry believes she treats Bivens respectfully (e.g., polite greetings) but admits to one heated phone exchange in July 2023. She sees Johnson as respectful until provoked, noting cultural differences influencing their reactions (e.g., Nicole's laughter and doodling as coping mechanisms).

DOCUMENTATION EFFORTS

- Lowry and Johnson documented their grievances off-site using personal laptops, combining Lowry's shorthand journal with typed records, and they shared their account with the union.

ALLEGATIONS AND RESPONSES

- Lowry admits to calling Bivens "Slave Master" but denies terms like "bitch" or "whore." She believes Bivens is racist, particularly toward educated Black women, but has not widely shared this view beyond church and home.

- When asked if she was referring to slavery when she called Bivens a slave master she said, “Yes.”

ISOLATION AND FEAR

- Lowry noted camp directors [REDACTED] and others avoid her, possibly fearing association, and feels HR has neglected her and Johnson, empowering Bivens’ abuse of authority further.
- Lowry has begun recording her conversations with Bivens, without Bivens’ knowledge. She said, “And I know it's wrong, but I don't care. I'm tired of her. And it seems as if nobody's giving me any relief. So I have to protect myself.”

SELF-REFLECTION

- Lowry ignores Karen’s “crazy talk” to cope but isn’t sure if her or Johnson’s actions inflame tensions. She believes Bivens’ behavior is the root issue.

LONG TENURE AND CONTRIBUTIONS

- With nearly 35 years at Hamden, Lowry has a history of stepping up (e.g., covering for Laura Luzzi) and supports kids via her son’s foundation, contrasting with her current mistreatment.
- Lowry provided letters of recommendation for herself and other documentation from individuals who expressed being aggrieved with Bivens’ conduct. **[Exhibit 11]**

NICOLE JOHNSON

Date: March 20, 2025

Time: 11:30 am

Location: Hamden Town Hall, First Floor Conference Room

Interviewer: Jaqueline Manning

Present: Dan Bonfiglio, UPSEU Union Representative, Shafiq Abdussabar NLI

Witness Title: Recreation Supervisor

The assigned investigator first walked through her joint grievance with Lowry that was filed related to an August 16, 2024, write-up by Bivens. Johnson and Lowry both declined to settle the write up through mediation, and it was noted to be pending. **[Appendix C 250-251]**

A CAMP ALTERCATION INCIDENT

- An altercation at a camp involved Lowry’s son, Lamont, who is a counselor. Johnson stated that she learned of the altercation from Lowry. Johnson said she was still at the office when she received the call from Lowry. Johnson said that she is Lamont’s supervisor because Lowry cannot supervise a relative, and she drove to the camp. When questioned why she did not notify Bivens, she stated that Bivens arrived at the camp at the same time she did, and she saw her pulling into the camp entrance.

TICKET DISTRIBUTION PROBLEMS

- Johnson was questioned about the distribution of tickets for Lake Compounce for camps and Bivens' allegation that the tickets were not properly separated for the camps for distribution. Johnson said she picked up the tickets from CRPA and delegated their delivery to camp counselors who were at the recreation department. She said it was a camp counselor named Aiden and another counselor. She said, "I know his face. I can't remember his name." Johnson stated that this is the way they have always distributed tickets, in one envelope, to the head counselor.

T-SHIRT ORDERING ISSUES

- Johnson was asked about the ordering of the camp tee shirts, which she was also written up for.
- Johnson said the new online system for ordering camp tee shirts resulted in incorrect sizes for campers. Johnson relied on numbers from Administrative Assistant Abdul, but discrepancies arose. Johnson claimed that Bivens and Lowry were in the office with her and approved the ordering of camp Polos for the Recreation Supervisors. Johnson said the colors for the camps are yellow and green, for the campers and the camp director. Johnson said in the past Lowry would order different colors for breast cancer awareness (pink) and Alzheimer's awareness (purple) for events, and they ordered pink and purple polos for themselves.

CASH BOX MANAGEMENT DISPUTES

- Johnson was accused of leaving \$600 in cash uncollected at the pool in 2024 and was asked about this.
- Johnson told a series of stories that were extremely difficult to follow, involving many other people, vague details and situations. This part of the interview was very strained and it was difficult to obtain an understanding of why Johnson did not collect the money from the pool.
- Johnson mentioned past practice, feeling uncomfortable with a situation that occurred when a lifeguard took the cash box home over the weekend, another situation when the mayor's office was waiting for the money, and that other people had the combination to the locker where the cash was kept. **[Exhibit 12]**
- Ultimately, Johnson stated that pool money had not been collected for almost a year. She also stated that she "thinks" someone else was picking up the money and that she was not comfortable picking up the cash box because if it was not accurate, she did not want to be blamed or suspected.
- When asked if she told the Director that she felt uncomfortable, Johnson said the Director asked her to talk about it at a meeting, but she did not feel comfortable, so she waited until mediation.
- Johnson stated that Bivens has directed her to pick up the timesheets for the lifeguards and to collect and turn in the money once it reaches \$200. Johnson stated that she goes with security to check the cash box. When asked if she sends the Director an update on the cash amounts, Johnson said she did not in the past, but the Director has asked her to submit a monthly accounting report; so she does give a report currently.

SILVER BELLS EVENT AND CUSTODIAL DUTIES

- Johnson was asked about the Silver Bells event and the tasks of cleaning and changing the tablecloths.

- Johnson again was wordy and indirect when communicating about this incident. She described how she was sick for a few weeks, visiting the Senior Center, that she was told to close the office early on Friday to make sure the event was all set, that she was sitting on the step, leaning on the step, who was there, what others were reportedly doing, etc.
- Johnson said that Lowry was instructed to clean soiled tablecloths with Lysol and replace the soiled table clothes from the previous event. Johnson began to describe that she started taking off soiled tablecloths and throwing them away. When Bivens came back, she asked why she was throwing them away when they could be wiped, and she told Bivens it was unsanitary.
- Johnson said she got the union involved because it is the custodian's job to wipe tables and replace tablecloths, and this was outside of the scope of her duties.
- Johnson admitted that she might have performed these tasks when she was working at the Senior Center, just to help out and pitch in.
- Johnson also admitted that as a supervisor it is her responsibility to pitch in when needed.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

DISPARAGEMENT

Name Calling

- Johnson admitting to calling Bivens a “bitch,” a “fat bitch,” and an “asshole” during her interview. When asked who she has called Bivens these names to she said, “More than likely Miss Sally.”
- When asked if she referred to Bivens as “master” or “slave master”, Johnson said, “*No, I prefer her as overlord.*” Johnson stated that she likens Bivens to the evil wizard who wants to take over in the *Lord of the Rings*.
- During the interview, Johnson made these admissions with a sense of pride and smiled and snickered when discussing her nickname of “overlord” for Bivens.
- Johnson denied calling Bivens a racist and whore.
- Johnson admitted, “*I've said to other employees that she has issues with women.*”
- Johnson said she mostly airs her complaints about Bivens and the way she feels about her to the union, Lowry, witness #14, [REDACTED]

Laughing at Director

- Johnson was asked if she laughed at Bivens during an interdepartmental staff meeting.
- She admitted that she did and was chuckling as retold the story.

- Johnson also told backstories about this incident in a roundabout manner.
- Johnson described that this discussion was related to camp activities, and she had created a spreadsheet and was planning trips and activities, which were not yet finished.
- Johnson said that the Director asked her to separate the camp activities by individual camps, make calendars and hang them up in the office. Johnson said she laughed, and the Director asked, *“Why are you laughing?”* She stated, *“And I’m like, because you’re asking me for blank calendars. And she said, put them on the wall.”*

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DIRECTOR

Toxic Work Environment

- Johnson perceives the department as toxic, citing Bivens’ micromanagement, last-minute changes, and control over tasks traditionally handled by supervisors. She noted staff fear Bivens due to her mayoral and HR connections.

Communication Breakdowns

- Examples include Bivens changing Johnson’s plans (e.g., camp trips, orientation) after Johnson’s preparations, not sharing revised documents, and inconsistent directives, leading to inefficiency and frustration. Johnson said she spends more time on corrections than working.

Request for Conflict Resolution

- Johnson seeks departmental training or mediation to address the toxic dynamic, acknowledging her withdrawal contributes to it but attributing primary instigation to Bivens.

Staff Fear and Exclusion

- Johnson claimed colleagues () fear reprisals from Bivens, and she and Lowry are ostracized (e.g., excluded from a Christmas party), linking this to Bivens’ influence.

Johnson’s Treatment of Director

- When asked what her perception is of how she treats the Director, Johnson said, *“Oh, I... I ignore her. In some situations, it’s not the best, but I usually don’t acknowledge her.”*
- Johnson said she limits her conversations with Bivens and mostly writes emails.
- Johnson said, *“Because when I do speak with her, it’s, it’s, she, I don’t know, I get tense, she gets tense. It’s, it’s combative. Or I’ll just like, just stare at her, because I’m not sure where we’re going.”*
- Johnson said she perceives that Bivens is petty and vindictive.
- When asked if she felt that there is any possibility that she could work cooperatively with the director, she stated, *“Honestly, no.”*

EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

INSUBORDINATION & UNWILLINGNESS TO PERFORM JOB DUTIES

BACK AND FORTH/LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Numerous witnesses observed that **Lowry and Johnson push back on Bivens' directives**. Numerous witnesses support Bivens' claims that there is a **constant back and forth** between Lowry and Johnson and the Director that is **negative, causing tension and departmental dysfunction**. Witnesses describe more openly insubordinate behaviors coming from Johnson, such as laughing at her directives, doodling and being distracted on her phone during meetings. However, **several witnesses also have observations that Lowry is influencing Johnson**, and the evidence found in this investigation supports this observation.

Additionally, the majority of the witnesses support that **"the back and forth"** with the Director and **"lack of accountability"** is coming from both **Lowry and Johnson**.

Bivens stated that Lowry and Johnson are a team, and she feels like she only has one Recreation Supervisor. She said **they insist on doing everything together**.

Witness #2 stated the **work climate is bad**. There is a **clear power struggle between Karen Bivens and Lowry**. Lowry has a reputation for running the place for years, and Bivens' arrival has caused tension with Lowry. "One of the biggest things was, **Ms. Sally** used to pretty much, even with the other recreational supervisors, she pretty much ran it as far as we know. She **was like the boss, the go-to person**."

Witness #2 also stated that there seemed to be many miscommunications between Lowry, Johnson, and Bivens and when issues arise from the conflicts, **Lowry and Johnson will attempt to shift the blame** for these problems **onto the camp directors**. "You almost feel like you need to record yourself when you talk to anybody because it's like my words are going to get twisted." He also stated, "It almost seems like every project that doesn't get done, the task was given to the recreational supervisors. **You call them, 'oh, it's Karen's fault.'**"

Witness #5 said, "You can tell there is tension, if you can read a room and you're paying attention. A little bit of back and forth, misunderstandings with Karen, **Sallie, and Nicole not agreeing with a new responsibility or an expectation** is something that comes up often, specifically around Nicole and Sallie. More Nicole."

Witness #6 described the work environment as one where the staff, particularly **Lowry and Johnson, were not doing their jobs** despite being competent individuals. "I didn't think Nicole in the very beginning was doing it on purpose...I would come home very frustrated, (and say to my wife) either (they are) incompetent or doing it on purpose... That was my perspective... and I know they weren't incompetent. **They are two very strong, very smart women, individuals I should say, they are totally capable of doing their job. And for some reason they weren't.**"

Witness #6 said Bivens had difficulty enforcing expectations, as evidenced by **Lowry and Johnson repeatedly failing to complete their tasks**. Even when Bivens clearly communicated what was expected, there was **resistance or negligence** in carrying out tasks. Witness #6 described **Lowry and Johnson as manipulating situations to avoid accountability**. This **lack of cooperation and failure to align with management expectations** creates tension and **negatively impacts the work environment**.

Witness #7 said there is a **constant back and forth, a tug of war**. Lowry and Johnson have shown **reluctance to carry out duties outside of their perceived roles**, leading to a **lack of cooperation**. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Witness #7 said witness #9 also actively resists Bivens' leadership and instructions. She said that the resistance towards Bivens seems largely due to her changes in programming and management and that she holds employees accountable.

Witness #8 **described Lowry and Johnson as insubordinate and highly confrontational.** He said **Lowry has a history of workplace conflicts.** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] He stated that Johnson has worked for the town since 2021, and she has become confrontational since she transferred to the Recreation Department. He attributes this **drastic change in demeanor to Johnson's close allegiance with Lowry and Lowry's influence.** Witness #8 also addressed the complaints Lowry and Johnson had about feeling discriminated against due to their race, especially Lowry. [REDACTED], causing her to follow suit in making **discrimination complaints.**

[REDACTED] She noted **significant tension in team meetings**, where **Bivens' instructions are always questioned.** The witness said **everything is questioned even when it does not need to be**, mostly by Lowry and Johnson. Witness #12 observed that **Lowry and Johnson frequently do not do what Biven asks them to, do not complete tasks as Bivens instructs, or reluctantly perform tasks.** She said there is **constant back and forth regarding requests and directives.** Lowry and Johnson are **frequently uncooperative** with Bivens.

[REDACTED] Witness #12 suggested that Lowry's long tenure with the department may be contributing to her **resistance to change**, especially with the introduction of new leadership and younger colleagues taking on new responsibilities. The witness suggested that Lowry might be **struggling with these changes**, which could be **affecting her willingness to adapt to new processes or leadership styles.**

Lowry stated that there is **no other solution to her issues with Bivens but to remove Bivens as the Supervisor of the Recreation Department.** She stated that the issues are **past the point of talking.**

SUMMARY

By her own admission, **Lowry is unwilling to report to Director Bivens.** Witness statements support that **Lowry is pushing back on Bivens' directives, instructions and initiatives.** While a certain amount of Lowry's frustrations may genuinely be related to significant departmental changes under Bivens leadership and Lowry's sense that she has been the backbone of the department for many years, **Lowry's conduct** is not only **causing tension** and friction with Bivens and other employees, but also **her behavior is encouraging Johnson's insubordination and hostility** towards the Director.

It is evident that **Johnson is looking to Lowry to lead in the department**, and the **power struggle between Lowry and Bivens** is moving Johnson to take direction from Lowry in **opposition to Bivens.** Witness #12 was a compelling witness in this investigation. Witness #12 is a new employee with a fresh, unbiased perspective. Her observations that **Lowry is holding onto past ways of operating**, including her ways of performing tasks in her previous position, led the witness to observe that **Lowry is resistant to departmental and operational changes.**

The evidence that Lowry is influencing Johnson to oppose the director can also be seen in the complaints that both have filed individually and jointly.

EXCESSIVE COMPLAINTS

Director Bivens has alleged that Lowry and Johnson are harassing her by filing excessive complaints and grievances in response to her efforts to supervise them. **[Appendix C 130-309]**

Several of Lowry's and Johnson's MPP filings and the arbitration for the August 16, 2024 grievance for being written up by Director Bivens are still pending. The underlying facts in these complaints are being addressed by this agency in a separate investigation report. For the purpose of addressing Director Bivens' complaints against Lowry, we will be addressing some of Lowry's complaints as they relate to her power struggle with Bivens.

DISCRIMINATION ALLEGATIONS

This investigation found that the **origin of conflict** between Bivens and Lowry stems from the **unresolved resentments Lowry is harboring from two incidents in 2022**. Lowry is still aggrieved that Bivens asked her when she was going to retire in 2022. Additionally, Lowry still resents Bivens for the incident at the office in November 2022, when Bivens asked her for her key after finding her office door unlocked and opened. These two incidents are the first two incidents that Lowry brought up during her interview on February 20, 2025. **Lowry said she is still hurt by these two interactions, and she believes that Bivens is racist and ageist.**

Lowry filed a CHRO in 2023, after she had been promoted to Recreation Supervisor position. She claimed Johnson was initially promoted over her because she is younger. Lowry also referenced the 2022 incidents in her 2023 CHRO complaint. Lowry's CHRO was dismissed by the State of Connecticut. However, Lowry still continues to hold the belief that Bivens is racist and ageist.

During her interview, when Lowry was speaking about Bivens asking her when she was retiring, **Lowry said, "That was it for me."** When speaking about the incident in November 2022, when Bivens asked her for the key to see if it would open her office door, she said that brown people are treated differently. Initially, Lowry said there were several other people present, but Bivens only asked her for her key. Later in the interview she said only witness #14 was there at the time because it was early in the morning. Notably, witness #14 is a black male.

Lowry also previously filed a discrimination complaint with CHRO in 2013 when she was not promoted. She claimed that she was discriminated against based on her age and race when two other employees, who were younger and of a different race, were given the jobs that she applied for. **[Appendix C 113-129]**

Notably, after Lowry's 2023 CHRO complaint was dismissed, Johnson filed a CHRO complaint in 2024 claiming that Bivens was discriminating against her because of her race, gender and age, as the youngest team member. However, during **Johnson's interview** with our agency, she **denied calling Bivens a racist and mentioned nothing about age discrimination**. She said she believed Bivens was **treating her differently because she is female**.

Lowry's chief complaint during this investigation was that Bivens is disrespectful and talks down to her, and she is confident that Bivens' behavior is motivated by racism and ageism. During the investigation, **Lowry admitted that she calls Bivens' "slave master" and that she is referring to slavery**. It is **evident that Lowry influenced Johnson's CHRO complaint** with claims of **race and age discrimination**.

COMPLAINT COLLABORATION

The unified complaint filings can be seen in a document that Lowry and Johnson worked together to compile. During Lowry's interview on February 20, 2025, she presented an 11-page typed document that Johnson typed containing their collective grievances from October 2022 through February 2025. **[Exhibit 2]** She also presented her handwritten notes which were memorialized in Exhibit 2. **[Exhibit 10]** The majority of the complaints in Exhibits 2 and 10, were also memorialized in formal filings with the Town of Hamden, Human Resources, the State of Connecticut grievance, and CHRO **[Appendix C 130-309]**.

While Lowry claims that **Exhibit 2** was authored off hours and on Johnson's personal computer, what is notable is that Lowry and Johnson have spent a **considerable amount of time creating the narrative that Bivens is abusing her authority**. This narrative and these conflicts between Lowry, Johnson, and Bivens are **spilling out into the workplace** affecting Bivens, other employees, and town departments. The **complaints are not contained** within the proscribed grievance process and have **completely impaired the workplace**. The **grievances are being aired in the workplace**.

GRIEVING/COMPLAINING WHILE WORKING

The evidence supports the claim that **Lowry and Johnson are grieving while working**, and that the complaints are **causing operational dysfunction and lowering employee morale**. The investigation finds that **Lowry is spearheading the divisive work environment** and the complaints coming from the department.

SILVER BELLS EVENT

Lowry and Johnsons filed an MPP over Bivens' directive to wipe and change some tablecloths for an event that the Recreation Department had planned and was hosting. **[Appendix C, 288-291]**

During **Lowry's interview**, she said, **"I am not a maid here."** Lowry's perception that it was a demeaning task stems from her belief that Bivens is racist, rather than a legitimate argument that Bivens asked her to perform duties that are outside of her job description. **[Exhibit 6]** During her interview **she said she has no problem helping if she is asked respectfully**. Additionally, **Johnson stated** during her interview that as a supervisor, she believes **it is her responsibility to assist when needed**.

Witness #7 and witness #13 also stated that **Johnson and Lowry were complaining about the task while working**. Witness #13 said Johnson and Lowry were **"carrying on"** and **"acting like Bivens had asked them to build the Taj Mahal."**

This grievance took up work hours from Human Resources, Bivens, [REDACTED], Johnson, and Lowry, and the **state ultimately determined the filing was frivolous**. Not only did Lowry and Johnson file a frivolous MPP to antagonize Bivens, but **both also made it known to other town employees that they were aggrieved** openly while executing the instructions Bivens gave.

This **complaint stems exclusively from Lowry's perception that Bivens is racist** and assigned her a task that a maid would perform. Additional evidence that Johnson did not have an issue with this task until Lowry voiced disapproval is found in the fact that witness#7, who used to supervise **Johnson**, said she **was cooperative and helpful before working with Lowry**.

WITNESS ACCOUNTS

Numerous witnesses discussed the “**back and forth**” between Lowry, Johnson, and Bivens and the duo’s resistance to following Bivens’ instructions and directions.

- Bivens stated that the job description for the Recreation Supervisor needs to be updated. Johnson and Lowry are very literal with it. There is a line at the bottom of the job description, which states “other duties assigned,” but Lowry and Johnson do not see that line. Bivens stated that Lowry and Johnson are very technical with their job descriptions.
- Witness #7 stated there are **a litany of ongoing complaints, spiraling**, and it is “**exhausting**.” She said Lowry and Johnson have shown reluctance to carry out duties outside of their perceived roles, leading to a lack of cooperation.
- Witness # 8 stated **Lowry and Johnson filed numerous complaints about minor issues**, such as Bivens using a red marker on a whiteboard, which Johnson claimed was embarrassing. These constant complaints detract from their actual job duties. Despite their grievances, Bivens continues to make efforts to manage the department, but Lowry and Johnson’s actions often undermine her leadership.
- Witness #11 spoke about collaboration with Johnson and Lowry [REDACTED] “They made it seem like they were given a very minuscule budget. **The way they talked about it made it seem like they were set up for failure**. As time went on, I attended other meetings. I was getting additional feedback. I realized that wasn't it.”
- Witness #12, [REDACTED] who works closely with Lowry and Johnson, said she will believe that everything is good and understood, and the next thing she knows is the union at the office meeting with Lowry and Johnson. “**Every little thing is a complaint. Everything is escalated.**”

ARBITRATION/GRIEVANCE, AUGUST 15, 2024 WRITE UP

It is notable that Bivens’ **write up** of August 16, 2024, **charged both Lowry and Johnson with six of the same complaints** and each had a 7th complaint that was individual and distinct. For Lowry, she was accused of submitting five hours of undocumented overtime and Johnson was accused of neglecting her duties at the Hamden High School Pool. Initially, the **Union filed a joint grievance to the write up**, but later refiled individual grievances. [Appendix C, 250-253]

During the investigation, **Bivens stated that Lowry and Johnson are inseparable**. She feels like she only has one Recreation Supervisor because **they insist on doing everything together**. This resulted in a joint write up.

What is notable is that several of **Johnson’s responses** to Director Bivens’ write up, claimed “**past practice**” or **longstanding practice**. [Exhibit 12]

These **claims clearly come from Lowry’s influence**. Lowry has over twenty years of experience working in the Recreation Department, while Johnson only came to the department in February 2023, under Bivens’ supervision. **Johnson has no “past practice” experience with the department to draw from.**

Both Lowry and Johnson were questioned about the incidents that were the subject of the write up. While Lowry’s defenses to the write up presented as more credible than Johnson’s, it is

notable that **Lowry and Johnson have enmeshed their complaints to the point of it being difficult to distinguish their joint actions and separate actions.**

Examples:

Regarding Bivens' complaints about the camp tee shirt order for the staff, **Lowry claimed that was all Johnson and Abdul.** However, **Johnson claimed that Lowry historically ordered different color shirts** to support town wide initiatives recognizing Alzheimer's and Autism awareness. This **indicates that Lowry was involved in influencing Johnson's ordering of the pink and purple polos** for themselves.

Additionally, Johnson claimed that **by October 2023, it had become "past practice"** for lifeguards to deliver the cash box to the Recreation Department. **[Exhibit 12] Johnson only began working for the recreation department in February 2023.** Lowry claimed that when she was an administrative assistant for the department, she was performing Laura Luzzi's job for her while she was ill [REDACTED]. This **"past practice" claim is clearly coming from Lowry** behind the scenes.

SOLICITATION OF COMPLAINTS

There is also **extensive evidence that Lowry is soliciting other employees and individuals.** Prior to and following the August 15, 2024 write up, **Lowry was actively collecting statements against Bivens** from parents of camp registrants and other employees and character letters for herself. **[Exhibit 11]**

Witness #2 and witness #3 stated that **Lowry approached them to write a statement against Bivens.**

Witness #2 stated that **Lowry and Johnson are attempting to involve camp employees in their managerial disputes with Bivens,** which he feels is **inappropriate.** Witness #2 stated that Lowry told him that she may need him to write a statement against Bivens. Additionally, **Lowry included him a group text** questioning that witness #12 [REDACTED] she was not corrected by Bivens. **[Exhibit 8]**

Notably, the department's organizational structure specifies that [REDACTED] **[Exhibit 13]** This is another example of how Lowry's history with the department conflicts with management under Bivens. When Lowry was in [REDACTED] she "reported to" Luzzi and DeMartino, as the Director over them, was not involved in overseeing the day-to-day operations, as Bivens has done under her tenure. However, what is significant is that **Lowry's response to this situation in the meeting made [REDACTED] feel uncomfortable** as if she had said something wrong. Also, **Lowry's immediate response** to this situation following the meeting, **was to send a group text** to Johnson, witnesses #2, #4, #14 and #15, **alleging that Bivens had failed to act appropriately,** that she was contacting the union lawyer, and that "only honest people" were included in the group text. This creates an environment of undermining the Director, casting suspicion on her within a group, and reinforcing that only certain people in the meeting can be trusted.

SUMMARY

As mentioned under the previous section of Insubordination/Unwillingness to Perform Job Duties, numerous employees reported that Lowry and Johnson are challenging Bivens' directives and instructions during interdepartmental meetings. The evidence supports the fact that Lowry

is resistant to any directions from Bivens and that she is influencing Johnson to resist the Director's leadership.

Johnson and Lowry are unified in complaints against Bivens and in opposing Bivens, both in formal filings and airing grievances openly while working. It is notable that Lowry and Johnson claim to have worked on an 11-page collection of complaints against the Director off hours, but filed an MPP to receive on-call pay in order to check their work cell phones for emergent issues off hours, when their job description requires them to be available on evenings and weekends for programming needs. **[Exhibit 6 and Appendix C 289-292]**

While it is the right of union employees to collaborate related to grievances towards resolving workplace disputes with management, the evidence supports that **Lowry is actively soliciting other employees and individuals to join her campaign to get the Director removed from supervising the Recreation Department.** During her interview, Lowry stated that the only solution to the strife is to remove Bivens from overseeing the Recreation Department.

Moreover, **Lowry is actively fanning the flames of Johnson's complaints** to Human Resources and **actively recruiting employees and individuals to align in opposition to Bivens.** Lowry's actions are **creating a hostile workplace for Bivens and other employees.**

HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT – HARASSMENT & BULLYING

HOSTILE LANGUAGE

During her interview, **Lowry admitted that she refers to Bivens as “slave master.”** She stated that **she is referring to slavery** when using this term. Lowry stated that she **believes Bivens is racist**, particularly toward educated Black women. She stated that Bivens is disrespectful and demeaning. **When discussing the Silver Bells event** and Bivens' request that she and Johnson wipe down the tables, **Lowry said, “I am not a maid here.”**

Other **employees have witnessed Lowry fanning allegations of ageism and racism** against Bivens.

Witness #5 said there have been concerns raised by Lowry and Johnson about being treated differently because they are Black women. **“The ways in which Sallie and Nicole air their complaints, there's sometimes a racial element to it.”**

Witness #5 also stated that he has **heard Lowry and Johnson call Bivens a “bitch.”**

Witness #6 said the conversation about Lowry's retirement was a sensitive subject, and Bivens' comment about when Lowry was planning to retire may have been **the tipping point that escalated the negativity and tension in the department.**

Witness #7 said **Lowry accused Bivens of racism**, but Witness #7 strongly disagrees with this accusation, highlighting Bivens' support for diversity and inclusion.

Witness #8 also addressed the **complaints Lowry and Johnson had about feeling discriminated against due to their race, especially Lowry.** He suggested that Lowry had [REDACTED] for Johnson, causing her to follow suit in making discrimination complaints. Witness #8 shared that Lowry had filed numerous complaints over the years, but in the past, they had been able to work through the issues.

Witness #9 reported that she believes that Bivens has ageism biases because of her ongoing tensions with Bivens.

Witness #13 has **heard Lowry and Johnson referring to Bivens with names like “bitch,” “fat bitch,” “whore,” “asshole,” and “(the) master.”**

Lowry denied calling Bivens a “bitch,” “fat bitch,” “whore,” or “asshole.” Johnson admitted to calling Bivens those names, except for “whore.” Johnson admitted to preferring the name “overlord” for Bivens opposed to “master.” However, **Lowry even admitted that Bivens has brought diversity** to the Town’s programming.

HOSTILE LANGUAGE SUMMARY

Lowry’s admission that she refers to Bivens as “slave master” in reference to slavery is evidence that she is **using racially hostile language towards Bivens**. Lowry denied calling Bivens other names, however, two witnesses have reported that Lowry and Johnson have called Bivens a “bitch.” Lowry did not present as having a disposition toward the use of foul language, such as “asshole” and “whore.” At the very least, **Lowry is using racial insults towards Bivens and creating a racially hostile environment for Bivens by calling her “slave master” and airing her belief that Bivens is a racist and ageist**.

CHARACTER DISPARAGEMENT/BULLYING/ALIENATION

In addition to creating a racially hostile environment for Bivens, the evidence supports that **Lowry is airing other negative perceptions of Bivens and attempting to influence a greater group resistance to Bivens leadership**. Many witnesses report feeling **very uncomfortable with Lowry’s and Johnson’s treatment of Bivens** and their **attempts to involve other employees**. The evidence supports that Lowry and Johnson are **character assassinating Bivens**, attempting to recruit support for the same, undermining her authority as Director, and being hostile towards her and other colleagues who are not in agreement.

Notably, **several witnesses expressed fear of retaliation from Lowry** and observations of a hostile work environment for Bivens. The Recreation Office environment is reportedly so hostile that Bivens has sought refuge in her alternative office at the Keefe Center.

Witness #2 said **Lowry and Johnson have a negative view about Bivens, which they air freely**. “You know, pretty much painting a picture of this, if you don't know the person for yourself, it **paints a horrible picture for this evil person** who's just here to take over and take jobs away from them.” He has never witnessed them being directly disrespectful or unprofessional toward Bivens at meetings, but there is body language and clear tension. Witness #2 agreed that **Johnson and Lowry are bonded together against Bivens**.

Witness #2 said **Lowry told him that there may come a time when she needs him to write a statement**. This was said in the context that Lowry was complaining that certain tasks with her job description were being taken away by Bivens. Witness #2 said that Lowry and Johnson are attempting to involve them in their managerial disputes with Bivens, which he said is not appropriate.

Witness #2 provided a screenshot of a group text message. **Lowry sent the witness a text message in group text** with Johnson and witnesses #4, #14, and #15, involving other employees in her accusation that Bivens did not act appropriately. **[Exhibit 8]**

However, the **fear of retaliation from Lowry is a recurring theme. Staff members are afraid to speak out against her due to her influence**. He felt **Lowry has a significant influence**.

Witness #3 said Lowry asked him to write a statement detailing irregularities related to the camp, particularly regarding the camp’s operations and financial management. “She wanted me to write

on the irregularities of what was going on with me and the camp. What we should be doing and what we shouldn't be doing.”

Witness #3 also mentioned instances when **Lowry and Johnson made negative comments about Bivens, particularly regarding financial decisions**, but never in an overtly disrespectful or public way. The witness clarified that they did not bad-mouth Bivens to him directly but **often speculated on Bivens' motives regarding funding decisions** related to camp activities and trips.

Witness #6 felt that the work environment had become toxic, with Lowry and Johnson contributing to a negative atmosphere.

Witness #7 said it is **2 against 1, with Lowry and Johnson against Bivens**. She said Lowry and Johnson have **looped witness #14 into hostility**, insinuating that he has not been hired for the full-time position he applied for because of Bivens. Witness #14 works in the same office as Lowry and Johnson, and Bivens does not work out of the Recreation Office because of the **combined hostility towards her**. The witness understands why Bivens does not want to be alone with Johnson, Lowry, and witness #14 because **they “make stuff up.”** Witness #7 said witness #9 also actively resists Bivens' leadership and instructions. The witness said these employees are forming an **“anti-Karen club.”** She said that the resistance towards Bivens seems largely due to her changes in programming and management and that she holds employees accountable. Witness #7 said **these employees are hostile towards Bivens** and resist following her instructions.

Witness #8 described the **work environment created by Lowry and Johnson as hostile**. As a result, Bivens prefers to work from her office at the Keefe Center, away from the constant tensions. Witness #8 stated that Johnson was argumentative with him during the MPP hearing on February 4, 2025, and **Lowry was hostile towards him after the hearing. Lowry refused to shake his hand** and said he was not her brother anymore because he testified favorably for the Town.

Witness #9, who was identified by Witness #7 as being a member of the “Anti-Karen club,” also **spoke ill of Bivens during the investigation**. Witness #9 **speculated about Bivens' motives** related to budgets and approval. The witness accused Bivens of being drunk at a town meeting, and claimed she **believed Bivens' conduct may be based on ageism**.

Witness #11 said that **Lowry and Johnson have “not nice” opinions about Bivens**, mainly that **Bivens will smile to your face but cannot be trusted**. She also stated that Lowry and Johnson misrepresent Bivens.

Witness #12 described hostility and questioning as a pattern that creates tension and undermines Bivens leadership as the Director. She said **Lowry and Johnson have an extremely negative attitude towards Bivens and are very critical of Bivens**. Witness #12 said despite the tension, Bivens is generally respectful and approachable in her professional demeanor,

maintaining a level of professionalism that contrasts with Lowry and Johnson's more negative attitudes.

Witness #12 observes that **Bivens is "walking on eggshells,"** uncertain about the reception she will receive from the team on a daily basis. She said that Bivens is clearly on edge every time she walks through the door of the Recreation Department. The witness can see the **apprehension on Bivens' face. She said, "It's hard to watch."**

The witness stated that **Lowry called Bivens "crazy"** [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The witness said that Lowry had said **that they are all family, and they have to look out for each other.**

Witness #13 said **"Miss Sally and Nicole have some type of grudge** or whatever it may be against Karen."

Witness #13 used to have more interactions with Johnson in her previous role and described her as happy, cooperative, and friendly. He noticed that **Johnson became disgruntled and developed a more negative outlook toward Bivens since she went to the Recreation Department.** The witness attributed this change to **Lowry's influence,** suggesting that Lowry played a role in escalating minor issues and encouraging Johnson to adopt a more hostile stance toward Bivens.

The witness has **completely distanced himself from Johnson and Lowry due to their negative attitudes and gossip about Bivens.** He said he **avoids them "like the plague."** He said **the behavior is toxic and makes him uncomfortable.**

The witness claimed that he has heard **Johnson and Lowry call Bivens many names, including "bitch," "fat bitch," "asshole," "whore," and "master."** He said the conversations between Johnson and Lowry sometimes **escalated into discussions about them "doing something about it."**

During her interview, **Lowry also admitted that she is recording Bivens** during conversations to protect herself.

HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENT – HARASSMENT & BULLYING SUMMARY

The witnesses support that **Lowry and Johnson are bonded together against Bivens** and that **Lowry is feared in the workplace** if you disagree with her. Witnesses state that the **environment is toxic and hostile.**

The evidence supports that **Lowry and Johnson are both disparaging the Director** with hostile language and are **creating and attempting to spread a negative perception of the Director.** The evidence supports that **Lowry is actively fostering a groupthink and bullying environment.** The evidence also supports that **Johnson is following Lowry's lead** and that **Lowry becomes hostile to other employees who do not align with her perspective and narrative.**

INVESTIGATION SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

The evidence collected and analyzed during this investigation supports the fact that Recreation Supervisor Sallie Lowry is in a power struggle with Director Karen Bivens over control of the Recreation Department.

This investigation found that the relationship between Lowry and Bivens was never able to develop into a cooperative, professional working relationship following the two incidents in 2022 and Johnson's promotion to the Recreation Supervisor position in February 2023. From this point in time Lowry held the belief that Bivens was an ageist and racist and all her experiences with Bivens are filtered through this belief.

This investigation has found that Lowry is genuinely struggling to adapt to the changes under Bivens' management, and Bivens' leadership style. Lowry reported feeling disempowered and degraded under Bivens' leadership, which further fuels her belief that Bivens is racist, to the point where she refers to her "slave master."

Some of Lowry's perceptions stem from her history in the department and the autonomy of the previous Recreation Supervisors, Laura Luzzi and Dave DeMartino. Bivens' arrival in the department brought major changes. In her complaint to Human Resources in 2023 [**Appendix C, 151-154**] Lowry was stated that the Recreation Department is different and micromanaged now. She also reported being aggrieved that Bivens stopped calling her Miss Sallie, as she preferred, and only called her Sallie. She believes this was based on racial disrespect.

While it is notable that Lowry has dedicated a significant amount of her life to working for the Town of Hamden, and specifically within the Recreation Department, her years of service do not justify her misconduct towards the Director. This investigation is not intended to underscore Lowry's years of service or her charitable contributions to the Town of Hamden's summer camps. For all intents and purposes, Lowry has a measure of dedication to the Town's programs and residents.

Nevertheless, Lowry believes that she is the victim of misconduct by Director Bivens and that her actions are in response to the way she perceives the Director treats her as the Recreation Supervisor. Lowry believes that she treats the Director respectfully, because she engages in pleasantries. However, most of the witnesses do not agree with Lowry's perceptions of how she treats the Director and are uncomfortable with Lowry's conduct towards Bivens. Lowry has been hostile towards employees who do not align with her arguments, she has attempted to recruit others to complain and oppose the Director's decisions, and several witnesses fear retaliation for their statements against Lowry in this investigation.

This investigation also finds that there are a significant number of misunderstandings and miscommunications in the department. Some of the misunderstandings can be attributed to natural confusion with the changes and unclear expectations by Bivens, however, what is notable is that Bivens only issued one written warning to Lowry and Johnson in the entire two years she has been supervising them. Conversely, Johnson and Lowry have filed numerous complaints against Bivens and many of the complaints were in a direct response to supervisory instructions from Bivens. In the evidence analysis of both documents and witness statements, Bivens does

attempt to direct and guide Lowry and Johnson, and they are resistant to taking direction from her. Additionally, Bivens' ideal outcome in this situation is for Lowry and Johnson to exercise due diligence, be conscientious, and stop fighting with her over everything. She indicated that he had a willingness to continue working with Lowry and Johnson if their behaviors change. Lowry and Johnson, on the other hand, indicated that they were unwilling to work with the Director.

The significant changes in the department under Bivens' leadership and Lowry's belief that Bivens is racist and ageist are the factors that have created a power struggle between Lowry and Bivens. The power struggle has escalated into Lowry creating a hostile work environment for Bivens and an effort by Lowry to remove Bivens as her direct supervisor. Lowry is unwilling to perform her job duties, specifically, she is unwilling to report to, assist, and take direction from Bivens.

Lowry has responded to the challenging changes in the Department by launching an all-out professional war against the Director through arguments, employee-resistance, excessive complaints filings, disparagement, hostile language, and the use of her long-term employment and relationships to attempt to influence a negative and oppositional faction against Director Bivens.

FINDINGS:

Sallie Lowry – Recreation Supervisor

- Insubordination – **Substantiated**
- Unwillingness to Perform Job duties -**Substantiated**
- Hostile Work Environment – **Substantiated**
- Violation of the Town of Hamden's Bullying and Harassment policy - **Substantiated**

END REPORT