



“DARKNESS CANNOT DRIVE OUT DARKNESS, ONLY LIGHT CAN DO THAT.”

~ DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Final Report

To: Jordanne Bryan

From: New Light Investigations

Date: 5/06/2025

Assigned Investigator:

Lead Investigator Shafiq Abdussabur, Chief Investigator Jacqueline Manning,

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NARRATIVE

Subject of Investigation: Karen Bivens, Director of Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness

Complainant: Sallie Lowry, Recreation Supervisor

Co-Complainant: Nichole Johnson, Recreation Supervisor (separate investigation)

Location: Town of Hamden

Allegations: Sallie Lowry's Complaint Against Karen Bivens

- Hostile Work Environment.
- Discriminatory Behavior and Unequal Treatment.
- Retaliation and Intimidation.
- Workplace Bullying and Psychological Harm.
- Witness Testimony Consistency.
- Exclusion from Duties and Communications.
- Failure to Investigate or Intervene.

Intake Summary

The purpose of this investigation is to conduct a comprehensive review of grievances and complaints submitted by Sallie Lowry, a Black female Recreation Supervisor and veteran employee within the Town of Hamden's Department of Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness. Lowry reported ongoing harassment, workplace bullying, and discriminatory treatment under the supervision of Director Karen Bivens.

The scope of the investigation includes an assessment of Lowry's claims. Allegations include a hostile work environment, repeated exclusion from departmental communications and meetings, public reprimands, retaliation for filing complaints, and disparate treatment compared to peers. Lowry also reported being denied adequate training, disrespected through name withdrawal, and subjected to a work environment that contributed to [REDACTED] reduced job performance.

The investigation additionally evaluates the department's adherence to anti-harassment protocols and whether administrative actions taken by leadership aligned with town policies and union guidelines. Lowry's claims are that multiple witnesses described a pattern of intimidation, fear of retaliation, and visible distress among staff, suggesting systemic issues within the department's supervisory structure.

Parallel investigations were also conducted by this agency of cross complaints that were made by Bivens against Lowry and her colleague Nicole Johnson, alleging harassment, insubordination, excessive complaints in retaliation for attempting to supervise and direct both employees in the course of their duties.

INVESTIGATIVE ACTIONS & OBJECTIVE

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

On February 20, 2025, Lowry provided a typed word document that contained complaints that Johnson documented spanning from **October 17, 2022, to February 2025**. **[Exhibit 1]** She

also provided handwritten journal entries that were later memorialized in **Exhibit 1. [Exhibit 2]** The majority of complaint entries in **Exhibits 1 & 2** have been memorialized within the formal complaints that Lowry and Johnson have filed against Bivens with Human Resources, and in State of Connecticut grievances and CHRO complaints. **[Appendix C, 130-309]**

Additionally, interviews were conducted by this agency with the complainant, Lowry and her colleague Johnson, the accused Bivens, as well as thirteen employees of the Town of Hamden. **[Interview Summaries, Exhibit 3]** Two additional interviews were attempted with witnesses #14 and #15, who were non-cooperative with this investigation. **[Exhibits 4 & 5]**

Furthermore, separate reports are being submitted by this agency related to cross complaints that Bivens has filed against both Lowry and Johnson. **[Exhibit 6]** However, the objective of both investigations was to identify the overarching patterns of behaviors by all the employees involved, conditions of the working environment in the recreation department related to the totality of the complaints, and any/all employee misconduct.

People Interviewed:

1. Sallie Lowry, Recreation Supervisor 2-20-2025 And 3-20-2025
2. Nichole Johnson, Recreation Supervisor 2-25-2025 And 3-20-2025
3. Karen Bivens, Director 2-26-225
4. Town of Hamden Employees [13]

Exhibits:

1. Hamden_Sallie_Lowry_Typed-Compliants_Oct2022_Feb 2025
2. Hamden-Sallie_Lowry_Hand Written Notes_Complaints_10_2022 To 7_2024
3. NLI Interview Summaries
4. Witness #14/HR Correspondence
5. NLI/HR Correspondence
6. Bivens Complaint to HR 1/27/2025
7. Recreation Supervisor Job Description_Sallie_Lowry
8. Bivens_Karen_Job Description
9. Whiteboard photo
10. Witness #2/Lowry group text
11. Senior Luncheon Photos
12. Witness #9 Notes
13. Public_Reference_Letters_Comdenction_02202025110725_Sallie_Lowry
14. New Hire Guide Town Of Hamden Personnel Policies
15. Cba_Sections_For_Investigation
16. Title VII Of the Civil Rights Act Of 1964
17. Harassment _ Age, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

SUMMARY OF COMPLAINT ENTRIES

This report provides a detailed breakdown of the total number of complaints recorded in **Exhibit 1**, including the number of times each individual is mentioned in relation to these complaints. This summary includes all complaints claimed by **Sallie Lowry** and **Nichole Johnson**. A total of **97 complaint entries** were recorded in a typed document authored by Nichole Johnson, spanning from **October 2022 to February 2025**. The complaints included workplace grievances, procedural concerns, CHRO, and administrative disputes.

Total Number of Complaint Entries:

- Sallie Lowry
 - Individual Complaints Entries- 3
- Nichole Johnson
(she authored of the compiled typed compliant document)
 - Individual Complaints Entries - 36
- Sallie Lowry and Nichole Johnson
 - Joint Complaints Entries - 58
- Total Complaint Entries- 97
 - Sallie Lowry - 3
 - Nichole Johnson - 36
 - Joint Complaints - 58

Conclusion & Observations

- **Nichole Johnson** lodged the majority of complaints (**94 out of 97**), indicating a significant role in ongoing workplace disputes and grievances.
- **Sallie Lowry** lodged fewer complaints (**61 out of 97**) but was still involved in major procedural concerns.
- Complaints spanned over a period of **2 years and 4 months**, alleging persistent issues in workplace dynamics.

Complaints Entries by Lowry and Johnson

The following document was presented by Lowry to Investigator Abdussabur during her interview on 2_20_2025. Johnson, during her interview on 2-25-2025, confirmed that she was the author/creator for this document for the complaints. The original document is in the exhibit section of this investigation. **[Exhibit 1]** This version has been slightly edited. The language, abbreviations and misspellings have been left unedited.

RS- Recreation Supervisor AA - Administrative Assistant ACA- Arts & Culture

Assistant BVs= Brooksvale Supervisor

October 2022

Complaint of Lowry (1-individual complaint)

AA Informed Bivens that she would be applying for the promotional position

Bivens Asked AA when she is going to retire.

November 2022

Complaint of Lowry *(1-individual complaint)*

Bivens saw her door open and asked AA if she knew why her office was open. AA stated that she did not know why. Bivens asked if all staff had a master key, AA stated that they did not. Bivens asked AA for her keys and tried AA's keys to see if they would fit her lock.

February 2023

Complaint of "DD"

RS retired from position with a week's notice after 25 years of service. RS expressed frustration in constantly being berated and harassed by Bivens. Bivens yelled and embarrassed RS in a staff meeting (AA, ACA & BV was present).

Complaint of Johnson *(1-individual complaint)*

New RS transferred to department mid week on February 17th. New RS received 4 days of training. Retiring RS left on February 25th.

March 2023

Complaint of Lowry *(1-individual complaint)*

AA was promoted to RS. AA during this period was still performing duties as AA.

Position was vacant for AA for 1yr. RS requested for training and stated that it was tedious attempting to fulfill both positions.

June 23,2023

1. **Complaint of Johnson** *(1-individual complaint)*-I was told to reach out to Crystal from marketing for a hiring flier for camp counselors. I was not please with the design and (
2. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** *(1-Joint Complaint)* Bivens came to my office and requested a list for campers. I told Bivens that the list was updated on June 8th and I had been working on fields. Bivens stated that she would ask Sally. I told her not to because I was the last person that had edited the file.
3. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** *(1-Joint Complaint)* Bivens ignored my suggestion and proceeded to ms.Lowry's office. I did not hear their exchange verbatim but I could tell that they were arguing.
4. (keep blank)
5. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** *(1-Joint Complaint)* Staff interviewed by HR regarding an investigation of an incident between Bivens and Lowry
6. Complaint of Johnson and Lowry *(1-Joint Complaint)* (keep blank)
7. **Complaint of McClain** *(1-individual complaint)*: McClain was explaining to Laura the intern the process of getting vendors for the summer events in the conference room. Bivens saw them in the conference room together and asked what they were talking about, McClain explained what was going on. Bivens became upset and proceeded to shout at Laura and McClain and accuse them of conspiring against her.

July 2023

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint)

HYBS and We the Village requested to use Rochford park for a back to school event. RS was instructed not to book space for HYSB. RS shared with Bivens that there was a slot available for the event. Bivens stated that she did not care, she is not giving it to them, and as the supervisor she said no.

August 2023

1. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Bivens verbally informed RS that the budget for the Caribbean festival was \$5000.
2. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Bivens took vacation the week of preparation. Informed staff that she would only be present as a spectator.
3. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Budget for the Caribbean Festival was cut 2 weeks before the event.
4. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Bivens stated RS was over budget and informed RS that the Pride event had only cost \$2500.00.
5. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Bivens stated she could not approve flier for promotion without all contracts being signed
6. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Bivens stated at the event that i was over budget, i questioned her as to what was the budget since I had spent below what she had initial state. She stated that the budget was for her to know.
7. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): would not state what was the budget for the event
8. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): I contacted the JAC and Town Clerk for assistance.
9. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Both parties contacted Bivens of which she stated that the budget would be returned to \$3000.
10. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Prior to leaving on her vacation before the event, RS requested for the checks to be prepared for entertainers on the day of the event.
11. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): On August 11th the day before the event, RS went to the finance department to collect the checks for entertainers. RS was informed that they were instructed by Bivens to have the checks mailed. The Chief of Staff visited the recreation department to check on staff and inquire if we needed any assistance. RS informed the Chief that we needed a check for a performer for tomorrow's event. Chief of staff stated that he would check with finance and get back to RS. RS was then sent a message from the Chief of staff that Bivens said that no checks should be made, performers would have to wait. (see image attached)
12. **Complaint of Johnson** (1-individual complaint): Vendor's check was held because he would not agree to the discount which Bivens requested. Bivens informed McClain to hold check and process last

13. **Complaint of Johnson** (*1-individual complaint*): Bivens informed me that he will never work for this Town again
14. **Complaint of Johnson**(*1-individual complaint*): Overtime request submitted to Bivens for hours worked at Caribbean festival. Bivens questioned RS on the actuality of work done and berated RS that over time requests were to be submitted prior to the event. Bivens was aware of the event in January 2023.
15. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*) -Bivens instructed RSs that their hours would be changed to 8:00am-5:00pm.

September 2023

1. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): Bivens requested program ideas for the remainder of the year.
2. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): Instructed that we put program breakdown on whiteboard in depart
3. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): September 8, came into work to see that program break down was marked with red marker
4. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): Before the department meeting, I expressed to Bivens thatRSs found her method of communication offensive. Bivens stated that she can do as she will, she is the director.
5. **Complaint of Johnson** (*1-individual complaint*): I went to HR and saw Kathy and Erica, showed them the picture of the whiteboard. (see image attached).
6. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): After the incident, no new programs were chosen, Bivens stated we did not have the money nor the time to create new programs.
7. **Complaint of Johnson** (*1-individual complaint*): RS vacation request for December submitted in September 2023 by email was not acknowledged. Bivens stated she would have to discuss it with the other Recreation supervisor. Bivens met with both RSs to discuss vacation time in december. Both RSs informed Bivens that there was no conflict in schedule, they had discussed vacation time pnor.

October 2023

- 8.
- 9.

November 2023

December 2023

1. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): Bivens instructed recreation staff to plan for MLK day in January.
2. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry** (*1-Joint Complaint*): Save the date for promotion was submitted for approval.

January 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): RS expressed to Bivens frustration regarding the unrealistic expectations in securing lifeguards. Rs expressed that the channels which Bivens instructed her to contact were not successful. Bivens stated that RS needed to be nicer to people and they might be more inclined to assist. Bivens instructed BOE staff, copied her on all communication and provided a weekly update on pool and lifeguards.

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Complaint filed with HR. No action taken. Upon request for an update of the complaint RS was informed that Bivens was busy and preparing for budget and could not meet.

11. **Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint):** Approval was delayed as Bivens stated that she needed to see a program for the event.

12. **Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint):** Program and Save the Date submitted for approval.

13. **Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint):** Bivens asked what was the location to host the event. stated that we would need to secure a location with senior services.

14.

15.

16.

February 2024

17. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):** We proposed for the canceled MLK celebration to be rolled into the Black history month celebration.

18. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):** Submitted a date for February 15th and a location a Thornton Wilder Hall

19. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):** During the staff meeting, Bivens stated that February 15 was too close of a time and we would not have enough time to promote.

20. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint) :** Bivens suggested we change the date to February 22.

21. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):** After the event date was changed to February 22 at staff meeting Bivens stated that there was another event by a private organization being held and would conflict with the February 22 event and we needed to support this organization.

22. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):** We requested for the event date to be returned to February 15. Bivens declined and said that we didn't have enough time for promotion. (in 2023 BHM was promoted 3 days before the event).

23. **Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):** ACA work hours were reduced after an interview with HR for June 2023. ACA invitation to

staff meetings was reduced and involvement in event planning. ACA stated that he was given little to no information regarding events and town activities.

24. Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): ACA was applied for the fair rent and Recreation AA position. Position was initially changed to include ACA. ACA was interviewed twice and was told that he was at the top of the list. ACA was never offered either of the positions. ACA was later told by Bivens that she heard he was talking about her and ACA was late in submitting a notice in September 2023.

March 2024

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint)

Vacation request submitted in January 2024 by email not acknowledged.

Leave of absence submitted not acknowledged.

Complaint filed with HR by RS regarding Bivens attempting to change the work schedule of RS.

RS requested training for department in conflict resolution and communication, and supervisor training for Bivens. Request not implemented nor acknowledged. RS was informed that Bivens was business preparing the 2024 budget and was unable to meet with HR.

KB informed the Economic Development Director to not speak with RSs without her knowledge and to not include RSs in the planning of the community center.

April 2024

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Mediation occurred between RS and Bivens. HR had requested for RS and Bivens to meet without union representation. RS declined and was sent an email from HR that he was disappointed in her decision.

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Bivens stated that RS was rude to a lifeguard and had gone over budget with the program. RS countered that the lifeguard had sent a text message stating that RS had instructed her to take money from the cash box at the pool.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): AA informed not to include RSs in group text when he will be absent.

May 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint):

Online registration for camp implemented. All staff involved expressed to Bivens that we were not ready and not properly trained to facilitate the immediate change. Online site was created in three(3) days. Staff was not appropriately trained. Site has ongoing issues, which has impeded the duties of the Administrative assistant.

AA spends a majority of his time correcting issues with the site. Issues have been expressed to Bivens and Brian Murphy. RS and Camp Directors did not receive a true number of applicants on the day of camp. Issues ongoing

Ongoing update of space used by HSA. Bivens stated that she saw the vice president and he was rude to her. After their interaction, Bivens became adamant that HSA would need to relocate from Brooksvale and find a different location.

Notice was sent to HSA in April 2024, that they would be able to use Brooksvale park, while Carusone is being maintained for fall play.

Due to complaints filed, job compensation was reduced.

All senior staff in administration given 12% increase plus stipend

June 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens instructed that there should be no paper applications available for vendors for events.

Link to sign up for events only available by emailing Bivens.

Vendors who visited the office to apply and pay for applications were turned away.

Vendors are personally selected by Bivens. Link was not made available to staff.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Legislative council members governing the recreation department Katie Keilly and Laura Sweet were contacted for a meeting. RSs requested the council to provide assistance for the abuse of power and interference of duties by the Recreation Director. Council women stated that they

July 2024

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): July 1 vacation and sick time request submitted. Email unanswered. KB stated in a meeting on July 2 that she will approve my sick time request but will need to review my vacation time.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Shepherd Glen had a pipe break and the building would be closed. Bivens was aware of notice and did not notify RS. She instead berated RS for not informing her immediately that RS was made aware. RS received notice at 5:06pm on the town phone.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Sessions for camp closes without notice to the public nor RS staff and camp directors. Camp sessions have never been closed.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens instructed that there should be no paper applications available for Residents to apply for camp. All paper applications were removed from the front desk.

Complainant Unknown-BVS requested vendors for the fall festival to use paper applications for the event in september; the request was approved by Bivens. RS requested twice for vendors to use paper applications for the event in August; request declined. Bivens stated that she would provide links to RS vendors. Link received July 15th with no access to approve nor deny vendors.

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Vacation request submitted for August 2024 by email not acknowledged. Bivens spoke with RSs after staff stated that she would not be permitting vacations before camp during the month

of May and she was not sure if she can approve the request for August, because it would be days before an event.

Abdul was granted vacation time during the registration period of camp without issue.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Vacation request was approved after the Recreation Supervisor contacted the HR department to intervene. Request approved August 2.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): July 18 Recreation Supervisor filed a complaint with the HR department stating harassment, bullying and intimidation by Director Biven. Complaint physically submitted to HR Director and sent by email. No response or reply issued.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): July 19 HR Director sent townwide recommended CCM training to all departments for Workplace relationships. No contact was made to the Recreation Supervisors regarding the complaint. No response issued.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): July 29 Training update sent. No contact was made to the Recreation Supervisors regarding the complaint. No response issued.

would discuss with the Mayor and HR to find a resolution to the issues within the department. **July 3**, email was sent for an update of progress. No reply.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Economic Development requested the use of the recreation conference room for a meeting with New Haven. When Bivens saw the group in the conference room she was annoyed. Bivens instructed RSs that moving forward RSs were not to reserve the conference room to the economic development dept because they had their own conference room. RS informed Bivens that the room was booked because their space was not large enough for the group attending the meeting. Bivens stated that she is territorial about the recreation department space and she must be informed as to all persons or groups using the conference upon request of reservation.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Economic Development requested on (date) use of Rec. conference room, request was denied. Bivens stated that the conference room had technical issues and would not be available. RS contacted the IT department to have the monitor and computer in the conference room checked for issues. No issues in the conference room were found. Bivens was informed, the request not approved. RSs were later informed that the Mayor would be using the recreation room at the time requested by Economic Development. Both meeting locations were switched.

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Parents submitted a complaint regarding a youth league. RS informed Bivens of the issue via email and in a staff meeting. Bivens stated that she would prefer we not get involved and have the parents and league figure it out. Parents not contacted nor emails regarding complaints acknowledged.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens requested a staff hiring list for Camp on Wednesday. RSs informed Bivens that they would be making a final review with directors and the final list would be available after.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens sent an email requesting a list at noon on Friday. RSs

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens issued an updated staff list to only camp directors. RS requested a copy for recreation staff. Bivens stated she would email the updated list to RSs. RSs are still without a list.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): [REDACTED] applied for a position as CIT and was placed at Shepherd Glen which would be an age appropriate location due to him being below CIT age requirement. [REDACTED] was relocated to the HHS with his friends.

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Complaint filed with Human Resources by RS. Update request and RS was informed that they are currently conducting an investigation.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): RSs were informed that [REDACTED] have been reporting to her about the staff at the camp. [REDACTED] also informed a counselor that [REDACTED] would not appreciate the length of her shorts." (see counselor note)

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens shares with the assistant director that the RSs "do not know what they are doing, and this is why she has to do everything herself." (see counselor note)

August 15, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Notice issued to both Recreation Supervisors stating a meeting with the Director and HR citing disciplinary actions.

August 16,

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens filed disciplinary actions against both Recreation supervisors for quality of work, safety and insubordination.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): September 3 both supervisors consecutively met with HR, union and Bivens. Director stated that she issued a written

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): September 10 Bivens sent notice stating that she will not withdraw her write-up against recreation supervisors.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Settlement agreement sent to both Recreation Supervisors see attached document.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Language of the settlement agreement for Recreation supervisor mirrors new language in contract presented to union.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Recreation Supervisors job duties were the only classification changed in contract. Recreation supervisors received a on May 17, 2024

July 18, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): The Recreation Supervisors filed a complaint with the HR department stating harassment,

bullying and intimidation by Director Biven. Complaint physically submitted to HR Director and sent by email. No response or reply issued.

July 19, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): The HR Director sent townwide recommended CCM training to all departments for Workplace relationships. No contact was made to the Recreation Supervisors regarding the complaint. No response issued.

July 29, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Training update sent. No contact was made to the Recreation Supervisors regarding the complaint. No response issued.

August 1, 2024

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): Complaint filed by Recreation Supervisor regarding Director withhold approval for vacation request submitted on July 1, 2024. Complaint was closed after HR contacted the Director to grant approval.

August 15, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Notice issued to both Recreation Supervisors stating a meeting with the Director and HR citing disciplinary actions.

August 16, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens filed disciplinary actions against both Recreation supervisors for quality of work, safety and insubordination.

September 3, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Recreation supervisors and Union Representatives consecitively met with HR Directors, Bivens. Director stated that she issued a write up to both Supervisors and not a verbal warning due to the seriousness of the infraction.

September 10, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens sent notice stating that she will not withdraw her write-up against recreation supervisors.

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Settlement agreement sent to both Recreation Supervisors (Recreation Supervisors declined agreement).

October 2, 2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Recreation Supervisors met with Bivens and HR for a write-up. Both Recreation Supervisors responded to write-up and provided supporting evidence. After the meeting HR was asked about bullying, harassment and intimidation complaints. HR director

Jorydayne Bryant stated that there would be an investigation by an external body.

October 15, 2024

(Step 2 of Disciplinary write-up for Johnson and Lowry:)

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): During a meeting with Town Representatives, the Town's Attorney addressed both Recreation Supervisors as "these folks." Attorney stated " these folks are probably looking for money." Recreation Supervisors were the only black women in the room. After the meeting, the Recreation Supervisor along with union vice president Thomas Brown, spoke with Kasey Catalioto regarding the microaggression directed at both Rec. Supervisor during the meeting.

Kasey stated that the issue would be addressed with all Town employees. Microaggression within the work place was never addressed by HR.

November 21,2024

Complaint of Johnson (1-individual complaint): NJ requested an immediate vacation request due to a family emergency. KB stated that she had concerns with the office being closed on monday due to a scheduled conference which both supervisors were slated to attend. NJ informed KB that the closure of the office was an issue. NJ would not attend the conference. KB proceeded to inquire as to the nature of the emergency before granting approval.

December 13,2024

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): On 12-12-25 Bivens instructed Rec. Staff to be at the Thornton Wilder hall on 12-13-25 at 2:30pm to prepare for the weekend event (breakfast with Santa). On 12-13 Bivens called rec. And visited rec. Office as a reminder to come to the hall at 2:30pm. On arrival at the location rec staff were instructed to clean the tables and gave a tube of lysol wipes.SL questioned KB the location of the custodian, of which KB replied he was tending to other duties. Please note an event was held earlier and soiled tables were left for Recreation staff. SM the other staff in attendance was called by KB to another location and SL & NJ were left to the task of cleaning and changing table covers.

January 3, 2025

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Director Biven instructed Recreation Supervisor NJ that she is to take home her office phone. NJ is to be on-call and record closing of pool and program due to inclement weather, staff call, or program cancellation. January 7, 2025 during department meeting, Director verbally instructed both Recreation Supervisors to take home phone. The third supervisor was not instructed to do so.

January 17,2025

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Union request update regarding bullying, harassment and intimidation investigation. No response from HR.

January 21,2025

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): Bivens instructed staff that they would be limited to 1-2 days of vacation time during the months of May-August.

February 4, 2025

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): MPP meeting held to address, both Recreation Supervisors being tasked to close office and clean [tables. During the meeting, Town Attorney Nick Grello, stated that he would like to address the issues between "Miss Bivens and the other two he will refer to as Johnson and Lowry." two HR representatives were present, neither addressed the microaggression targeted to both Supervisors. During an exchange between this writer and Attorney Nick Grello. The Attorney stated to NJ, "do not speak to me, speak to the state, I am not speaking to you, do not speak to me." Both HR and Union representatives were present, along with Town witness Kim Craft, Senior Services Coordinator.

February 4, 2025

Complaint of Johnson and Lowry (1-Joint Complaint): HR responded to the complaint filed on July 18, 2024 by Recreation Supervisors.

LOWRY JOB DESCRIPTION [EXHIBIT 7]

Town of Hamden – Recreation Supervisor Job Description

Position Title: Recreation Supervisor

Department: Recreation

Work Location: Hamden Town Hall and various recreation facilities

Employee: Sallie Lowry (Complainant)

Position Summary

The Recreation Supervisor is responsible for overseeing, coordinating, and administering a variety of recreational programs and special events for the Town of Hamden. The role requires planning, implementing, and evaluating programs that serve diverse community populations. The supervisor plays a vital leadership role in managing program operations, supervising staff, engaging the public, and ensuring the quality and safety of town-sponsored recreational activities.

Examples of Essential Duties:

The Recreation Supervisor must be able to perform the following key duties, which are vital to the role:

- **Program Development and Coordination:** Design, schedule, and implement a variety of recreational and community programs, including athletic leagues, youth and senior activities, seasonal events, and educational workshops.
- **Staff Supervision:** Recruit, train, schedule, and supervise part-time staff, program leaders, coaches, volunteers, and seasonal employees.
- **Budget Preparation and Oversight:** Assist in preparing and managing the recreation department budget, including program cost estimates, tracking expenditures, and maintaining financial records.

- **Public Engagement:** Serve as a liaison between the Recreation Department and the general public, schools, community organizations, and outside vendors to ensure collaborative programming.
- **Facility Management:** Schedule and oversee the use of recreation centers, gymnasiums, fields, and parks; inspect facilities for safety and maintenance needs.
- **Marketing and Communication:** Promote programs through flyers, newsletters, social media, and community outreach to maximize participation and awareness.
- **Reporting and Documentation:** Maintain records of program participation, incident reports, staffing, and other administrative data; prepare periodic reports for department heads or town officials.
- **Policy Enforcement and Safety:** Ensure that all programs adhere to safety regulations and department policies, including responding to accidents or issues during events.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Required:

This position requires a strong combination of technical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and leadership abilities:

Knowledge:

- **Community Recreation Principles:** Understanding of how to design and evaluate effective recreation programs that reflect community demographics and needs.
- **Municipal Budgeting and Financial Procedures:** Ability to work within the town's financial systems to develop and manage cost-effective programs.
- **Public Relations and Customer Service:** Knowledge of conflict resolution, public communication, and building positive community relationships.
- **Safety and Liability Practices:** Familiarity with OSHA standards, injury prevention, risk management, and safety planning for recreational settings.
- **Administrative Systems:** Proficiency in record-keeping, scheduling systems, and basic office technology (Microsoft Office, Google Workspace, etc.).

Skills:

- **Organizational Skills:** Ability to plan, prioritize, and execute multiple programs simultaneously with attention to deadlines and quality.
- **Communication Skills:** Strong written and oral communication skills for interacting with the public, writing reports, and leading meetings.
- **Leadership and Team Management:** Skills in motivating and supervising diverse staff and volunteers.
- **Problem-Solving and Decision-Making:** Ability to assess program needs, resolve scheduling or staffing issues, and make decisions under pressure.
- **Marketing and Promotion:** Skills in developing creative outreach and promotional strategies using traditional and digital media.

Abilities:

- **Work Independently and Collaboratively:** Capable of functioning with minimal supervision while working within a team-oriented department.

- **Adapt to Changing Needs:** Flexible and responsive to programmatic shifts, emergencies, or community feedback.
- **Engage Diverse Populations:** Sensitivity to cultural and social diversity, ensuring inclusive program design and delivery.
- **Handle Physical Demands:** Must be able to lift, carry, and set up program equipment and work indoors and outdoors in varied conditions.

Working Conditions and Schedule:

- Must be available for work during **evenings, weekends, and holidays**, as required by program needs.
- This role involves both **indoor office work** and **on-site field work** at parks, recreation centers, and event venues.
- Occasional lifting of up to 25 lbs. and regular movement during events is expected.

Minimum Qualifications:

- Bachelor's Degree in Recreation, Physical Education, Public Administration, or a related field.
- Two or more years of experience in recreation programming or a supervisory role.
- A valid **driver's license** and reliable transportation.

LOWRY INTERVIEW #1

Date: February 20, 2025

Location: Hamden Town Hall, Conference Room FL-1

Investigators: Jacqueline Manning, Shafiq Abdussabur

Present: Sallie Lowry, Union Representative Dan Bonfiglio

Section 1: Employment History & Role Challenges

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)**.

Issues Identified:

- **Lack of Training:** Neither Lowry nor her co-worker Nicole Johnson received formal training after their promotions in 2023.
- **Reliance on Retired Supervisor:** Due to inadequate training, they sought guidance from former supervisor **David DeMartino**.

- Hostile Work Environment Allegations: Reports of inappropriate comments and actions by the Recreation Director.

Section 2: Incident Review & Allegations

The investigation involved a review of documented workplace incidents, including grievances filed against management.

Review of Incidents (Part 2 of Interview)

- Investigator and Lowry reviewed and organized workplace incidents spanning **October 2022 – February 2023**.
- Lowry and her representative clarified which complaints applied to her versus others.

Grievance Filings & Administrative Actions (Part 3 of Interview)

- Grievance Filed:
 - **Sallie Lowry:** (6 disputed charges identical to Johnson’s + 1 unique regarding timesheets).
- Timeline:
 - Grievance was filed after a written warning was issued on August 16, 2024.
 - Grievance covers **July 2024 – August 2024** (no grievances were filed for incidents in 2022-2023. One filed with HR and other filed with CHRO).

Specific Incidents:

- **October 17, 2022:** Director asked Lowry about her retirement plans, 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:** 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.”*
- **Written Warnings 8/16/24:** Issued to both Lowry and Johnson regarding administrative issues

LOWRY INTERVIEW #2

Date: March 20, 2025

Location: Hamden Town Hall, Conference Room FL-1

Investigators: Jacqueline Manning, Shafiq Abdussabur

Present: Sallie Lowry, Union Representative Dan Bonfiglio

Section 3: Key Issues and Themes

Emotional and Mental Toll

- Lowry is aggravated and tired, [REDACTED] due to prolonged workplace stress caused by her conflicts with Bivens.
- Lowry is very 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 **August 16, 2024** write up Lowry received from Bivens was reviewed with Lowry. **[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 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, questioning the absent custodian’s role. She stated, *“I am not a maid here.”*

Karen’s Disrespectful Management Style

- Lowry stated that Karen as 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 and Bivens followed her. Lowry said that it is intimidation, and she would have called the police.

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 new software.

Perception of Karen

Lowry likes Karen personally (e.g., her hair, fun nature, diverse programming) but dislikes her behavior—calling her “Slave Master” for treating her as unintelligent. Lowry said this is rooted in racial and age-based disrespect.

Proposed Solutions

- Lowry believes removing recreation from Bivens’ oversight (one of six departments) is the only fix, as Karen’s overburdened, stressed state hinders success.
- HR talks (since October 2022) have failed.

Workplace Dynamics

Lowry treats Karen respectfully (e.g., polite greetings) but admits to one heated phone exchange. She sees Johnson as respectful until provoked, noting cultural differences influencing their reactions (e.g., Nicole’s laughter and doodling as a coping mechanism).

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 calling Karen “Slave Master” but denies terms like “bitch” or “whore.” She believes Karen is racist, particularly toward educated Black women, but hasn’t widely shared this view beyond church/home contexts

Isolation and Fear

- Lowry notes camp directors 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 Biven’s 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 Biven’s behavior as 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.

BIVENS JOB DESCRIPTION [EXHIBIT 8]

Town of Hamden – Director of Culture, Recreation & Wellness

Position Title: Director

Department: Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness

Work Location: Hamden Town Hall and various recreation facilities

Employee: Karen Bivens

Position Classification:

- **Appointment Type:** Confidential Mayoral Appointment (Non-Bargaining Unit, Unclassified/Non-Competitive)
- **Department:** Recreation / Community / Youth / Elderly Services
- **Reports To:** Mayor or designee
- **Supervises:** Recreation, Youth Services, Community Services, Elderly Services, and Community Development Block Grant employees
- **Salary:** Dependent on qualifications (DOQ)

This executive-level position oversees the delivery and management of **community, recreation, wellness, and public service programming** in the Town of Hamden. Stationed at the **Keefe Community Center**, the Director is responsible for integrating services that promote **health, equity, youth engagement, senior support**, and overall community well-being. The position focuses on **maximizing the use of parks and recreation facilities** while delivering impactful, inclusive programming.

Expanded – Examples of Essential Job Duties:

Leadership and Strategic Development

- Provide high-level oversight for Recreation, Youth, Elderly, and Community Service operations.
- Develop and implement short- and long-term strategic goals aligned with town leadership and legislative priorities.
- Direct and manage municipal programs and facilities to meet evolving public health, wellness, and recreation needs.

Community Engagement and Advocacy:

- Serve as the Town's advocate for **older adult services**, particularly for vulnerable and underserved populations (e.g., LGBTQ+ 60+).
- Attend Council, Board, committee, and staff meetings to offer insights, guidance, and implementation strategies for community programming.
- Strengthen relationships with local organizations and promote collaboration across departments and service sectors.

Operational Oversight:

- Manage the operation and maintenance of recreation facilities, parks, and community wellness programming.
- Establish and enforce operational procedures, performance standards, safety protocols, and legal compliance practices.
- Track performance and oversee data-driven improvements in service delivery.

Communication and Relationship Building:

- Foster strong partnerships with community stakeholders, employees, and external partners.
- Ensure that services are inclusive, accessible, and representative of Hamden's diverse populations.
- Promote transparency, responsiveness, and high standards of customer service throughout departmental activities.

Fundraising and Financial Management:

- Secure grants and external funding to expand or support wellness and recreation programming.
- Support fundraising events and identify public-private partnerships that align with town goals.
- Monitor financial performance, budget adherence, and resource allocation.

Crisis Management and Resilience:

- Lead departments through public health challenges and crisis scenarios with professionalism and clarity.
- Enforce public health guidelines (e.g., CDC recommendations) across programming and facilities.

Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

- **Public Service Leadership:** Proven ability to direct multi-department operations in community, health, and recreation.
- **Policy and Compliance Management:** Knowledge of municipal government structure, regulatory frameworks, and administrative accountability.
- **Program Development:** Skilled in designing community-driven programs that promote health, wellness, and social engagement.
- **People Management:** Effective in leading diverse teams and building morale and performance in public service environments.
- **Crisis Response and Communication:** Able to respond calmly and strategically in high-pressure or emergency settings.
- **Fiscal Oversight:** Competent in budget management, grant applications, and use of public funds.
- **Interpersonal Engagement:** Strong communication, mediation, and consensus-building skills.

Minimum Qualifications:

- **Education:** Master's degree in Public Health, Health Science, Park and Recreation Administration, or equivalent experience.
- **License:** Valid Connecticut Driver's License required.

Work Environment:

- Primarily office-based with regular meetings, community events, and field visits.
- Exposure to standard office noise and interruptions.
- May involve lifting light to medium-weight items (files, manuals, supplies).
- Interactions with emotionally distressed individuals are possible, requiring calm and professionalism.
- Occasional night meetings and off-site obligations.

Additional Notes:

- This is a **mayoral appointment** that requires **Legislative Council approval** and serves at the discretion of the Mayor.
- Job functions listed are illustrative and not exhaustive. Reasonable accommodations may be made for individuals with disabilities.

BIVENS INTERVIEW SUMMARIES

Date: February 5, 2025 & February 26, 2025

Time: 1:00 pm & 3:00 pm

Location: Hamden Town Hall

Interviewer: Jacqueline Manning

Title: Director Cultural Affairs & Human Resources

Organizational Structure

- Bivens oversees six divisions under Human Services: Recreation, Community Youth Services, Senior Services, Arts & Culture, Brooksville (Animal & Park Services), and Fair Rent.
- She serves as the appointing authority for hires and disciplinary action across divisions.
- Direct reports include recreation supervisors (Johnson, Lowry), administrative staff, Brooksville Ranger, and part-time Arts Assistant.

Personnel Management Issues

1. Recreation Supervisors: Johnson & Lowry

- Bivens described both supervisors as lacking organizational consistency and accountability.
- She stated they resist directives, frequently fail to communicate critical program details, and demonstrate inflexibility with scheduling and responsibilities.
- Claims include:
 - Incomplete documentation of program hours.
 - Ongoing disputes over work hours vs. compensation.
 - Resistance to participating in events or supporting department-wide programs.

2. Breakdown in Communication

- Bivens reported repeated efforts to improve clarity, including:
 - Creating program outlines and calendars.
 - Requesting email CCs on essential communication.
 - Offering flexibility in scheduling with minimal response.
- She said her staff often ignore requests or delay responses, contributing to inefficiencies and project delays.

3. Disrespect & Resistance

- Bivens reported an emotional toll due to constant complaints, resistance, and undermining behavior.
- She moved her office from Town Hall to the 1 due to perceived hostility and tension.
- She described instances of being blindsided by grievances and departmental mistrust.
- Bivens has heard that Johnson and Lowry are disparaging her to other employees.

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. However, Lowry turned it into a CHRO complaint, and Bivens didn't 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, who was also acting as the Administrative Assistant for a stipend. Lowry later filed a harassment complaint against Bivens over this incident.
- **Pool Schedule and Complaint:** Bivens faced many issues with Johnson regarding the pool schedule at Hamden High for open swim sessions. 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 out to ensure coverage for Monday's open swim. They filed an MPP complaint against her for this request requesting on call pay.
- **Silverbells Event** – Johnson and Lowry filed a 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.
- **Sally Lowry's Grievance and CHRO Complaint** – After Bivens initially offered a recreation supervisor position to Nicole Brown-Johnson, Lowry filed a grievance claiming she deserved it due to seniority and prior experience filling in for Laura Luzzi (a deceased colleague). HR Director Bridgette Cogswell convinced Bivens to hire Lowry to avoid further grievances, given Lowry's history of litigation. Lowry later filed a CHRO complaint alleging sexism, racism, and ageism, partly based on the misinterpreted retirement comment by Bivens.
- **Caribbean Festival Budget and Overtime Issues** – Johnson proposed a Caribbean festival with a budget that initially exceeded expectations and omitted key costs (e.g., sound equipment). While Bivens was on vacation, Johnson failed to submit invoices timely, delaying vendor payments (town policy: net 30). Post-event, Johnson claimed 10 hours of overtime without prior approval, leading to communication disputes with Bivens.
- **Union and HR Dynamics** – Lowry's history of grievances and CHRO complaints (pre- and during Bivens' tenure) and attempts to shift bargaining units (ME3537, July 2024) complicate matters. HR interventions (e.g., Bridgette Cogswell's advice) influence her decisions.

Communication

Bivens stated communication with Lowry and Johnson is full of strife and back and forth just for her 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 grant approvals. There are constant miscommunications, misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Bivens said she scrutinizes her emails to make sure she doesn't 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 she was mean [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. She finds it challenging to direct them without causing offense.
- **Disparagement and Defamation:** Bivens claims Lowry disparages her to staff and the public, e.g., calling her a "slave master", criticizing her parenting, and possibly leaking the pizza truck PO. Anonymous Facebook comments on "Hamden Needs Solutions" also target her.

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. There is a line at the bottom of the job description, which says other duties assigned, but Lowry and Johnson don't see that line. There have been a few times that they have said they don't 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 are wash, rinse, repeat programs and Lowry had many years of experience in the department.
- **Phone line Information Issue:** Despite Biven's instructions, Johnson did not follow the protocol and did not change information on the recreation phone line. Bivens provided step-by-step instructions for Johnson on how to access and change the outgoing voice information and Johnson still has not executed the task properly and timely. Johnson's voice message on February 5, 2025 that the pool was going to be closed on February 6, 2025 for inclement weather does not even acknowledge that the caller has reached the Town of Hamden. Furthermore, as of February 9, 2025, Johnson still had not updated the information line.
- **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.
- **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 of same.

- **Timesheet Pickup by Lowry's Son:** Nicole was responsible for collecting timesheets, but when she was unavailable, Bivens asked Lowry to do it. Lowry sent her son, Lamont, instead, raising security concerns (e.g., access to a locked area). Bivens emailed Lowry, instructing her not to delegate such tasks to non-staff.
- **CIT Dress Code Dispute:** A Counselor in Training (CIT) wore shorts violating the camp dress code (mid-thigh length, per risk management). Bivens addressed it after Lowry and Johnson didn't, prompting an argumentative call from the parent, Mr. Casaboom, who cited Lowry, claiming widespread dislike of Bivens among counselors.
- **Supervisory Challenges and Resistance:** Lowry and Johnson resist Bivens' directives (e.g., timesheets, tablecloths, program forms), often claiming lack of training or arguing tasks aren't their responsibility (e.g., proofreading department released information). Bivens struggles to direct their work effectively.
- **Program and Fiscal Management:** Issues arise from mismanagement or miscommunication, e.g., unpaid port-a-potty bills, Caribbean festival budget overruns, and lifeguard scheduling failures. Bivens aims for fiscal responsibility and process improvement (e.g., program forms, voicemail script).

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. *"I'm, but it's just, it's been very uncomfortable. It's been very, very uncomfortable. You know, like to constantly be accused..."*

- **Staff Morale and Witness Reluctance:** Camp directors express fear of Lowry or reluctance to get involved, complicating Bivens' evidence gathering. Witnesses resist Lowry's recruitment attempts.

Other Employee Issues

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

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Systemic & Structural Concerns

- Bivens cited:
 - Historical lack of leadership before her arrival.
 - Vague job descriptions leading to selective interpretation of duties.
 - Cultural resistance to direct supervision.
- Describes the department as lacking “programming muscle,” with few initiatives beyond summer camps.
- She reported that “some employees think they should be peers, not subordinates,” and resist administrative authority.

Complaint Abuse

- Bivens believes employees bypass her and file grievances prematurely.
- She referenced Witness #9, Lowry, and Johnson as aligning against her.
- She alleged that HR and union processes are used to undermine leadership instead of resolving disputes.

JOHNSON INTERVIEW #1

Date: February 25, 2025

Location: Hamden Town Hall, Conference Room FL-1

Investigator: Jacqueline Manning, Shafiq Abdussabur

Present: Nicole Johnson, Union Representative Dan Bonfiglio,

Section 1: Employment History & Role Responsibilities

Johnson’s Career at Hamden Town Hall

- Hired: November 2021 as an Outreach Counselor (Senior Services).
- Union Membership: Initially in the Town Hall Union.
- Supervisor: Directly reported to Susan Burbage (Senior Coordinator, Senior Services), who reported to the Mayor until April 2020.
- Workload & Responsibilities:
 - Assisted elderly community members.
 - Conducted outreach programs.
 - Collaborated with two other outreach counselors.
 - Worked 35-hour weeks under Senior Services.

Promotion to Recreation Supervisor

- Promoted: February 2023 as Recreation Supervisor.
- Union Change: Transferred to UPSEU (United Public Service Employees Union).
- Expanded Duties:
 - Supervised seasonal employees:
 - 35 - 40 total, including camp counselors, pool staff, and park monitors.

- Managed event planning, recreation programming, and budget handling.
- Reported directly to Bivens (Recreation Director).
- Lacked a clearly defined updated job description post-promotion.

Section 2: Key Incidents Leading to Complaints

Incident #1: Caribbean Festival Budget Controversy

Background:

- Johnson proposed an annual Caribbean Festival, which Bivens approved.
- Initially granted a \$5,000 budget, which was later reduced to \$3,000 unexpectedly.
- Johnson had already booked vendors and scheduled entertainment.

Events Leading to Conflict:

- Budget Reduction:
 - One to two weeks before the event, Bivens unexpectedly slashed the budget.
 - Vendors and entertainers had to be canceled or rearranged last minute.
 - Additional support sought from local sponsor Karine Hollis' organization.
- Public Misrepresentation:
 - Despite spending only \$2,900, Bivens accused Johnson of overspending.
 - Bivens falsely claimed Johnson exceeded the budget by \$10,000.
 - Union Rep and HR later confirmed this was incorrect.
- Retaliation Post-Event:
 - Bivens began refusing to give Johnson clear budgets for future events.
 - Whenever Johnson asked about her budget allocation, Bivens replied:
 - "I don't know—how much do you want to spend?"
 - "I'll let you know when you're over budget."
- April 2024 Mediation Outcome:
 - During mediation, Bivens admitted she made an error in budget reporting.
 - However, no corrective action was taken against Bivens.

Incident #2: The Whiteboard Incident

Background:

- Bivens requested Johnson and other supervisors to list program plans for the year on a whiteboard. **[Exhibit 9]**
- The whiteboard was in a shared hallway visible to staff and volunteers.

Conflicting Actions:

- Public Critique:
 - Bivens used a red marker to make corrections and critical comments on the whiteboard. **[Exhibit 9]**
 - This was seen as public embarrassment rather than constructive feedback.
- Verbal Response:
 - Johnson politely expressed concerns about public corrections instead of private communication.
 - Bivens dismissed Johnson's concerns, stating:

- “I’m a supervisor—I can do whatever I want.”

- HR Involvement:
 - Johnson reported this issue to HR, showing photographic evidence of the publicly visible critiques.
 - HR advised using email instead, but no formal action was taken against Bivens.

Incident #3: Harassment Complaint

Background:

- Bivens entered Johnson’s office while she was actively working and started speaking to her.
- Johnson continued working while listening attentively.

Bivens’ Accusations:

- Bivens suddenly accused Johnson of being disrespectful for “not making eye contact” while she was speaking.
- Bivens raised her voice and began berating Johnson in her office.
- HR complaint filed:
 - HR acknowledged receipt of the complaint but failed to take action.

Incident #4: Forced After-Hours Work at Pools

Background:

- Bivens ordered Johnson to conduct pool inspections outside normal work hours.
- Johnson requested overtime pay before agreeing.
- Initially approved, then suddenly revoked by Bivens.

Union Involvement:

- The Union stepped in, arguing labor law violations regarding forced off-the-clock work.
- HR delayed addressing the issue, citing budget season constraints.
- April 2024 Mediation Outcome:
 - Johnson’s concerns were validated.
 - Bivens received no formal discipline.

Incident #5: Delayed Vacation Approval & Retaliation

Background:

- Johnson submitted her vacation request in July for August.
- Bivens ignored emails for weeks, then added extra tasks as a condition for approval.

Escalation:

- Johnson proved all tasks were completed.
- Bivens still refused to formally approve vacation.
- Johnson escalated the issue to HR, who overruled Bivens and granted vacation.

Retaliation Post-Vacation:

- Two weeks later, Johnson was written up with colleague Lowry.
- Seven disciplinary charges were issued, including:
 - Safety violations
 - Work quality issues
 - Insubordination
- Union classified this as a retaliation case.
- Filed an Unfair Labor Practice claim (MPP - Municipal Prohibited Practice).

Incident #6: CHRO Filing – Escalation to State Level

Filing Details:

- Johnson submitted a complaint to the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights & Opportunities (CHRO).
- CHRO assigned Johnson a state-appointed attorney.
- Mediation scheduled for March 2025.

Requested Outcomes:

- Official acknowledgment of workplace misconduct.
- An apology from Bivens & HR for negligence.
- Mandatory conflict resolution training for Bivens & staff.
- Stronger HR intervention in future complaints.

Section 3: Patterns Of Behavior & Workplace Environment

Bivens' Leadership Issues

- Public reprimands (Whiteboard incident, budget accusations).
- Inconsistent rule enforcement (arbitrary budget approvals).
- Retaliation against complaints (delayed responses, written warnings).
- Dismissive attitude toward grievances (ignored HR reports).

HR's Inadequate Response

- Acknowledged issues but took no action.
- Failed to enforce corrective training.
- Offered a generic "customer service webinar" instead of conflict resolution training.

JOHNSON INTERVIEW #2

Date: March 20, 2025

Location: Hamden Town Hall, Conference Room FL-1

Investigators: Jacqueline Manning, Shafiq Abdussabur

Present: Nicole Johnson, Union Representative Dan Bonfiglio

Johnson was interviewed in response to the complaints that Bivens filed against her, incidents related to the write she received from Bivens on August 16, 2024 [REDACTED] & Appendix C, 250-251]

Section 1: Key Incident Summaries

Incident #1: Camp Altercation Involving Supervisor's Child

- An altercation involving a camp counselor (Lowry's son) was reported indirectly.
- Johnson was informed by Lowry and approached Bivens informally at the scene.
- Reporting chains were unclear; the matter was never formally escalated through expected protocols.

Incident #2: Ticket Delivery & Procedural Consistency

- Johnson confirmed she picked up tickets to Lake Compounce from CRPA in Newington for the summer camps.
- She directed counselors, [REDACTED] and another counselor, to deliver them to Camp Director, mirroring past procedure.
- No established protocol was violated, yet the action became part of disciplinary write-up.

Incident #3: Camp T-Shirt Ordering Confusion

- Orders were made using data from a new online system implemented by admin [REDACTED]
- Colors were coordinated by camp groups: yellow for campers, green variants for staff.
- Later criticism focused on not including the entire department in the polo order.
- Johnson said past practice by Lowry was to order different color polos related awareness campaigns for Alzheimer's and Autism (Pink and Purple)

Incident #4: Cash Box Controversy

- Inherited from previous leadership, the responsibility for collecting the pool's cash box became disputed.
- Lifeguards, traditionally responsible, but were unreliable or absent.
- Johnson faced contradictory instructions and was later accused of telling someone to remove money—an allegation she denies and found deeply distressing.
- Bivens issued a formal directive that Johnson now follows under duress.

Incident #5: Silver Bells Event: Cleaning Tables

- Johnson and Lowry were told to close the department and clean and change disposable tablecloths.
- Johnson objected, noting health concerns and custodial boundaries.
- She documented concerns as "unsanitary" in a post-event feedback request from Bivens.

Incident #6: Voicemail Incident & Public Humiliation

- After being instructed to update the department voicemail, Johnson did so—but was publicly accused of not completing it.
- Bivens played the voicemail during a meeting to undermine her, despite Johnson having followed protocol.
- Johnson believes the voicemail system may not have saved her change—but Bivens' method was punitive.

Incident #7: Public Calendar Instruction & Emotional Reaction

- Bivens demanded the creation of blank calendars despite Johnson's concern that there was no content yet.
- Johnson laughed out of disbelief and frustration—Bivens labeled her behavior as disrespectful.
- Johnson explained it was an involuntary response to avoid an emotional escalation.

Section 2: Toxic Workplace & Cultural Observations

Emotional Intelligence & Management Style

- Johnson defines emotional intelligence as self-awareness, empathy, and constructive communication.
- She believes Bivens lacks these qualities—exemplified by combative tone, public correction, and inability to accept alternative views.
- Multiple staff have reported feeling intimidated by Bivens, including long-standing employees.

Micromanagement & Diminished Autonomy

- Johnson cited repeated interference: events she planned were changed post-approval.
- Schedules were altered arbitrarily.
- Department responsibilities that previously belonged to her were taken over without notice.
- Tasks were often reassigned without communication or documentation.

Disrespectful Conduct & HR Inaction

- Bivens was described as vindictive and petty—retaliating after vacations, belittling staff, and playing favorites.
- Bivens' proximity to the Mayor was cited by HR (specifically Witness #8) as a reason for inaction.
- This has discouraged employees from speaking out.

Staff Fear & Social Isolation

- [REDACTED] like Witness #14, [REDACTED] were named as fearful of Bivens.

- Bivens allegedly isolates and undermines those on her “bad side,” which includes Johnson and Lowry.
- They were excluded from the holiday party due to Bivens’ non-response to invites.

Communication Breakdown

- Johnson limits face-to-face contact with Bivens due [REDACTED] and past verbal attacks.
- Requests for intervention and conflict resolution training have gone unheeded.
- She reports feeling unsafe and unsupported.

Section 3: Self-Reflection & Admissions

- Johnson admitted to calling Bivens “Overlord,” “bitch,” “asshole,” and “fat bitch”— in private with Lowry.
- She denies ever calling her a “slave master” or “racist” or “whore.”
- She admitted to ignoring Bivens and not acknowledging her.
- She acknowledges this behavior contributes to a tense climate—but frames it as reactive, not instigative.
- She actively requested conflict resolution support but believes she cannot work cooperatively with Bivens.

WITNESS INTERVIEWS

A total of 13 Town of Hamden employees were interviewed by this agency between February 5, 2025, and March 12, 2025. Interview summaries are included as an exhibit in this investigation. **[Exhibit 3]** Efforts were made to interview two additional witnesses Witness #14 and Witness #15. Witness #14 declined to be interviewed and requested that the Town of Hamden appoint a lawyer to represent him. **[Exhibit 4]** Witness #15 did not respond to Human Resources multiple requests to schedule an interview. **[Exhibit 5]**

Some of the witnesses interviewed shared their knowledge related to specific complaints lodged by Lowry and Johnson. Many witnesses spoke to the general interpersonal dynamics between Johnson, Lowry and Bivens.

Witness #1

- Witness does not have much interaction with Lowry
- Lowry did come to the pool to pick up timesheets one time
- Witness did see Lowry’s grandson Lamont also come to pick up Lifeguard timesheets once at the pool. He said Lamont just came in, picked up the time sheets and then left.

Witness #2

- Witness #2 stated the work climate is bad. There is a clear power struggle between 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.”*

- 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.”
- Lowry and Johnson make many comments about their issues with Bivens and speculations about her motives.
- Witness believes that 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.
- [REDACTED] screenshot of group text message that Lowry sent related to how a new employee introduced herself and that Bivens did not correct her. **[Exhibit 10]**
- Witness said Lowry said she may need him to write a statement against Bivens, which he does not feel is appropriate.
- Witness stated that he has known Lowry for a long time, is fond of her personally, but fears [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- Witnesses say that Johnson and Lowry attempt to shift blame for errors onto camp employees
- There are ongoing issues with T-shirts orders and camp registration. A lot of the issues stem from internal power dynamics. When he calls Lowry and Johnson to address the issues, they blame Bivens. “*Oh it's Karens' fault.*”

Witness #3:

- On a few occasions, Lowry and Johnson approached the witness to ask if he would support filing a complaint against Bivens, but the witness did not engage in this
- Lowry asked him to write a statement against Bivens, which the witness does not feel is warranted
- He does have disagreements with Bivens but she is not disrespectful toward him. The disagreements relate to him advocating for more activities for campers.

Witness #4:

- Johnson and Lowry are very professional and helpful
- Bivens is always highly professional
- The witness does not feel disrespected by Bivens
- The witness has never seen Bivens be abusive.

Witness #5:

- There is a lot of back and forth during interdepartmental meetings
- Lowry and Johnson “vent” about Bivens.
- He has heard them call her a bitch.
- They have implied racism by Bivens, which he does not find valid

- He gets along well with Bivens and works cooperatively with her. There is mutual respect
- Bivens is the best boss he has ever had.

Witness #6:

- The witness observed that Johnson often doodled or was distracted during meetings, even when asked by Bivens to pay attention.
- *He said, “Never ever did I hear Karen raise a voice or be disrespectful.”*
- 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. 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.
- Even after this meeting, Johnson and Lowry still did not order the shirts for the staff.
- 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 used to be close with Lowry and pray with her as they share faith. He has distanced himself from her and stopped praying with her. He said he saw a spiteful side to Lowry and, *“I just could not do it anymore.”*

Witness #7:

- Pushbacks against Bivens’ leadership stem from Bivens’ attempts to impose order, accountability and discipline
- Tensions during weekly interdepartmental meetings, as particularly very 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 the conditions.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- Lowry, Johnson and Witness #14 have alienated Bivens from the recreation office with their hostility.

- The employees “make up stuff” about Bivens and are incredibly hostile towards her.
- Allegations include **racism**, which the witness finds untruthful. She said Bivens has created supported new and diverse programming and is very inclusive.
- Witness #7 fears retaliation from Lowry for speaking out against her during this investigation.
- Witness described a harmonious and respectful working relationship with Bivens

Silverbells Event

- [REDACTED] Bivens brought wipes for a few of the tables for the Silverbells Event.
- [REDACTED] that was held the day before Silverbells. [Exhibit 11]
- 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]

Witness #8:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] resentments and CHRO complaints.
- He has been involved in attempting to resolve Johnson’s and Lowry’s complaints
- Johnson, initially hired at Elderly Services with no prior issues, became argumentative and insubordinate after moving to the Recreation Department
- Johnson and Lowry have formed a close allegiance and he believes Lowry has poisoned Johnson to [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] Johnson are described as creating a hostile environment through insubordination and confrontation, making it difficult for Bivens to manage the department
- A proposed mediation in April 2024 between Bivens and Johnson failed when Johnson insisted on union presence, shifting its tone from resolution to confrontation
- A key complaint involved Lowry and Johnson refusing to clean tables for the Silver Bells event, claiming it was custodial work, despite it being part of their event setup duties, leading to an MPP hearing where Johnson argued with witnesses [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- Lowry and Johnson file numerous complaints (e.g., over Bivens' red marker corrections), consuming time that detracts from work.

Witness #9:

- Witness # 9 lodged similar complaints to Johnson and Lowry
- The witness has a very strained relationship with Bivens
- “I have been keeping notes since 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 12]
- The witness said none of the incidents with Biven 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 able to be grieved but add up to a toxic work environment.
- The witness cited chief complaints against Bivens as denying regular and overtime participation in historical programs, micromanagement, budget confusion, delayed and unclear communication, lying, criticism, dismissiveness, and program and event mismanagement.

Witness #10:

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

Witness #11:

- Witness worked with Johnson and Lowry [REDACTED]

- She believed Johnson and Lowry [REDACTED]
- Witness said Lowry and Johnson have “not nice opinions” about Bivens, which she does not agree with.
- Witness works harmoniously with Bivens

Witness #12:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- She noticed the tension in the department [REDACTED]
- Witness notes significant tension in team meetings, where Bivens' instructions are always questioned. Witness said everything is questioned even when it does not need to be, mostly by Lowry and Johnson.
- Witness observed that Lowry and Johnson frequently do not do what Biven asks them to do, do not do tasks as Bivens instructs, or reluctantly perform tasks.
- [REDACTED]
- Lowry and Johnson have an extremely negative attitude towards 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 leadership style is perceived by Lowry and Johnson as controlling, leading to resistance and reluctance in following her directives.
- The witness describes 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 he/she knows is the union at the office meeting with Lowry and Johnson
- [REDACTED] Back and forth with Lowry, Johnson, the Director and the union is very 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, "you are new, you'll see."
- The witness suggested sharing an idea with Bivens about the camp registrations, which are transitioning from paper to online, and Lowry remarked, "Good luck with that one."
- Lowry's general attitude when it comes to the witness and Bivens is like, *oh look at the new girls with her new ideas, she will find out.*
- Lowry has said that they are all family, and they have look out for each other.

Lowry's Former Role:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED] Lowry is resistant to changes and new initiatives and methods.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- Lowry shows resistance to relinquishing control over certain tasks, such as issuing pool passes.
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- 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 suggests 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 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."

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.
- Witness has harmonious and positive working relationship with Bivens and feels comfortable approaching her and sharing ideas

Witness #13:

- During the Silver Bells event, Lowry and Johnson offered to help with the cleanup. However, they both expressed that wiping down the tables wasn't 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 reported frequent negative comments from Lowry and Johnson about Bivens.
- 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".

SUMMARY OF DISCOVERY COMPLIANTS

Subject: Sallie Lowry

Supervisor: Karen Bivens

Position: Recreation Supervisor

Department: Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness

Agency: Town of Hamden

Time Frame: October 2022 – February 2025

This analysis reviews a series of complaints and grievances filed by Recreation Supervisor **Sallie Lowry** regarding the conduct, treatment, and disciplinary actions under the leadership of Director **Karen Bivens**. Lowry, a long-standing employee of the department since 1989, alleges discriminatory behavior, retaliation, unequal treatment, and micromanagement. The documentation includes internal complaints, formal CHRO filings, union grievances, written disciplinary actions, MERA filings, and arbitration proceedings.

June 5, 2023 – CHRO Complaint

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Age discrimination and retaliation following a promotion initially offered to a younger candidate.
- Loss of event duties and deteriorating treatment by Bivens.

Outcome:

- Formal CHRO charge filed.

- Dismissed by the State of Connecticut.

June 23, 2023 – Internal Complaint

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Exclusion from communications, repeated tasking under deadline pressure, and spreading false claims regarding payroll errors.
- Pattern of verbal disrespect.

Outcome:

- Witnessed by multiple staff.
- Complaint supported union filing and CHRO case.

August 16, 2024 – Written Warning Issued by Karen Bivens to Sallie Lowry

Incidents Cited by Sallie Lowry:

- Emergency response failures, unauthorized trips, improper timesheet entries, and field operation mismanagement.

Outcome:

- Formal warning issued. Prompted grievance filing.

August 20, 2024 – MPP 35409 Filed

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Town retaliated after Lowry and Johnson filed bullying complaints.
- Warning issued days later.

Outcome:

- Hearing scheduled for September 27, 2024.
- Claimed violation of MERA.

August 20, 2024 – Grievance (Step 1)

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Claimed written warning lacked just cause.
- Union cited poor communication and role confusion.

Outcome:

- Town upheld discipline.
- No retraction granted.

September 10, 2024 – Step 1 Grievance Response

Hamden Town's Position:

- Discipline warranted.
- No documentation submitted that disproved the cited infractions.

September 11, 2024 – Step 2 Grievance Filed

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Reasserted grievance and added claims of ticket mismanagement tied to unclear procedures.

Outcome:

- Mediation offered.
- Town proposed removal of discipline after 1 year and corrective coaching.

October 25, 2024 – Step 2 Grievance Response

Hamden Town’s Offer:

- Counseling meeting and clean record if no future incidents. Union notified;
- Lowry considered agreement.
- October 26, 2024 – Settlement Declined

Outcome:

- Lowry declined settlement terms. Grievance unresolved; arbitration requested.

December 9, 2024 – Step 3 Arbitration Filing

Context:

- Case escalated to formal arbitration.
- Union submitted fees and scheduling initiated.

January 8, 2025 – MPP 35527 Filed

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Lowry and Johnson assigned custodial tasks outside their scope.
- Claimed as an unauthorized change in working conditions.

Outcome:

- Hearing scheduled. Union seeks reversal and remedies.

January 27, 2025 – Pending MPP (On-Call Directive)

Allegations made by Sallie Lowry:

- Unilateral policy change requiring off-hour phone monitoring.

Outcome:

- Union demands reversal and compensation.
- MERA violation alleged.

February 21, 2025 – Arbitration Hearing Scheduled

Context:

- Step 3 arbitration proceedings scheduled to review unresolved grievances.

Outcome:

- Hearing pending. Pre-hearing withdrawal deadline set for February 14, 2025.

Key Issues:

- **Discrimination Allegations:** Lowry’s CHRO complaint focused on age-related comments, promotion bias, and retaliation.
- **Retaliatory Discipline:** Written warnings closely followed the filing of harassment and bullying complaints, alleging a pattern of punitive management behavior.
- **Systemic Issues:** Multiple grievances, witness testimony, and overlapping complaints reflect broader issues.
- **Union Escalation:** Two separate MPP filings and a formal arbitration highlight the depth of organizational conflict.
- **Breakdown in Communication:** Lowry reported persistent exclusion, lack of training, and intentional disrespect by her supervisor.

Summary

The relationship between Sallie Lowry and Director Karen Bivens is marked by persistent tension, disputed authority, and perceived bias. Complaints reveal extreme interpersonal conflict. Despite internal grievance procedures and mediation attempts, several matters remain unresolved and are pending arbitration and formal labor hearings. The cumulative record supports a pattern of communication breakdown affecting broader departmental operations.

COMPLAINT REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

6-5-23 CHRO [Appendix C, 130-150]:

Sallie Lowry, who has worked for the respondent since 1989, was promoted to recreation supervisor in 2023 after initially being passed over by younger candidate Nicole Brown Johnson. Lowry reported an age-related comment made by her supervisor, Karen Bivens, in October 2022, believing it to be discriminatory. Since then, Bivens' behavior towards Lowry has been disrespectful, and she has removed Lowry's responsibilities for events like the Martin Luther King Jr. and Juneteenth celebrations. Lowry believes her age influenced the promotion decision and that Bivens retaliated against her.

Analysis

Lowry filed a charge of age discrimination with the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, which was dismissed on September 27, 2024. The Commission cited that the Town of Hamden provided significant documentation reflecting that Lowry did not test first for the position and nevertheless was promoted three weeks later to the second open recreation supervisor position. CHRO concluded the claims and evidence there was no reasonable possibility that the investigation of the complaint would result in a finding of reasonable cause.

During Lowry's interview with our agency, she stated that she was still hurt by **two incidents in 2022, which she perceived were ageist and racist**. Lowry has not accepted the dismissal of her CHRO complaint, as these incidents were referenced in the CHRO. The first incident occurred in October 2022, when Bivens reportedly said, *"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."*

During Bivens' interview with our agency she stated 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.

The second incident occurred on November 20, 2022. Bivens' requested Lowry's key to the office after Bivens found her office door unlocked in the morning, which Lowry 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.**"*

Later in the interview **Lowry stated that only Witness #14 was there at the time** because it was early in the morning. Notably, **witness #14 is a black male**. Witness #14 refused to cooperate with this investigation. He requested that an attorney be appointed to represent him by the Town because "everyone else has legal counsel." [Exhibit 4]

Investigators interviewed **three black females, two black males, three white females, and five white male witnesses**, for this investigation. **Age ranges** of employees interviewed also **varied**. Most **witnesses indicated that they were uncomfortable with the behavior and treatment of Bivens by Lowry and Johnson**, regardless of the witnesses' gender, race or age.

Additionally, during her interview, **Johnson did not present any evidence related to discrimination based on race or age**. She stated that she believes Bivens alleged discrimination is based on her gender and that Bivens has **issues with female subordinates**.

Bivens was consistently described by witnesses as **conscientiously inclusive** and brought **new diversity to programming for different cultures and ages groups**. **Lowry stated** during her interview, "So **she's [Bivens] very diverse**, she's brought some new diverse programming to the town."

6-23-23 Complaint [Appendix C 151-155]:

The incident that triggered this complaint related to Bivens repeatedly asking Lowry for copies of Port-o-potty invoices while Lowry was in the middle of other tasks and on the phone with witness #4.

Lowry also alleged that Bivens only communicates with Johnson about tasks that are part of Lowry's responsibilities, suggesting Johnson could help despite it not being something that can be shared. Lowry alleged Bivens is disrespectful. Lowry stated that she is still training Johnson and McClain but has not received training for managing both jobs herself. Bivens was accused of excluding Lowry from direct communication, instead asking Johnson to relay information, which Lowry feels is disrespectful since they are equal in their roles.

Lowry said the mayor and Bivens spread false claims about Lowry making errors in the camp payroll, which were later found to be incorrect. This issue was never communicated directly to Lowry for clarification. Additionally, Bivens was accused of going to the Mayor to complain about Lowry on multiple occasions. Bivens also changed how she addresses Lowry, moving from "Miss Sallie" to just "Sallie," and, more recently, has stopped calling her by name altogether, while still using names for others.

Witnesses: **Witness #4, Nicole Johnson, Witness #14**

Desired outcome: Put an end to the repeated behavior. Ensure the Administrative Assistant position is filled, as Lowry was currently doing both jobs. **The Recreation Department has changed and is now being micromanaged.**

Analysis

Witness #4 previously provided a statement to human resources about this incident. She was on the phone with Lowry when Bivens was asking for the invoices. She wrote, "**Karen's tone was upsetting and demanding**. Sallie was working on three different things. **Her [Sallie's] tone was even /she never raised her voice once**. She handled it well – better than [I would have]."

Witness #4 was interviewed for this investigation. **Witness #4 stated that Bivens is always very professional**. "I don't have any problems with her. I have a good relationship with her." When asked if she **ever found Bivens to be unreasonable**, she said **no**. When asked if she **ever witnessed Bivens being abusive**, she said, "Oh, no. Not at all."

In Johnson's statement to Human Resources, she said that **she heard Lowry and Bivens arguing**. "I heard **them arguing** – not **shouting just elevated**."

Lowry's and Johnson's own statement, conflict with Witness #4's original statement that Lowry's tone was calm and even. It is notable that **Witness #4** was on the phone with Lowry and **was not present to witness the entirety of the incident. Witness #4 had a limited perspective.** Additionally, witness #4 characterized the part of the incident that she did overhear as Bivens having an **upsetting and demanding tone.** During this investigation, she stated that she has **never witnessed Biven's being abusive** or experience abuse from Bivens.

Again, **Witness #14 declined to participate in this investigation** unless he was appointed a lawyer by the Town. Witness #14 also provided a statement in the Human resources investigation. Witness #14 claimed that Bivens was creating a hostile environment, claiming "**She [Karen] uses foul language** in the office, and in meetings it has become so elevated I have **had to excuse myself - from the curse words** and heated tone." Notably, **not one employee** interviewed in this investigation ever **accused Bivens of using foul language or curse words, including Lowry and Johnson.** Witness #14's previous statement was **not found to be credible**, calling the reliability of his previous statements into question.

During her interview with our agency, Bivens said that the CHRO complaint made her tread very lightly around Lowry. However, that June 2023, the department received a request from the port-a-potty vendor who said they had \$17,000 worth of unpaid port-a-potty bills from previous years. She said Lowry was the administrative assistant at the time many of the services were rendered. **Bivens said it was the end of June and the end of the fiscal year, and she was in a panic.** She said she asked Lowry for all the invoices and purchase orders that were paid previously. Lowry told her she would get it for her later because she was on the phone. Bivens said she needed it by the end of the day and asked Lowry to just tell her what filing cabinet it was in so that she could reconcile the unpaid invoices, submit them for payment, and reconcile the remaining funds in the budget for the Council.

"I couldn't figure out why she just wouldn't just give me the book. I could look through it while she was talking to a camp director and busy. I'll start looking through it."

Bivens said Lowry filed a complaint with Human Resources claiming that Bivens was very rude to her and disrespectful to her.

Bivens said this complaint prompted interviews with several employees by a former Human resources employee, Nadia Balassone. **[Appendix C, 151-157]** Bivens said Human Resources did an investigation, but it was very messy. She was not interviewed by Human Resources. "It was very sort of like attempted being damning towards me."

This situation was found to be **an interpersonal conflict between Lowry and Bivens. Bivens admitted that she was in a panic** because of end of fiscal year pressure and numerous outstanding invoices that Lowry had control over.

Other aspects of this complaint are based on perception rather than substantive facts. Lowry Generally wrote, "unsafe," "harassed," "intimated," "bullied," "discriminated against [age (possibly race?)]" and "Hostile environment where **my supervisor and the Mayor are trying to get me fired;** but there has never been any disciplinary on my record from working here." Ultimately, **Lowry was not penalized or written up by Bivens for any issues related to payroll and time sheets** at this time.

Written Warning issued 08.16.2024 [Appendix C 252-253]

Warning notice to Lowry included:

1. Water Supply Issue (7.2.2024)

There was a water supply issue at two Camps. Recreation Supervisors were instructed to notify the Department Head during any emergency situations as they arise.

2. Field Trip Without Approval (7.5.2024)

Recreation Supervisors sent Gold Dragon Camp on a last-minute field trip without consulting the Department Head or notifying parents in advance. This lack of communication caused anxiety for campers and inconvenience for parents, as they didn't have enough time to prepare their children.

3. Incident Between Counselors (7.16.2024)

A fight and use of inappropriate language between camp counselors occurred, affecting campers. The Department Head was not notified promptly and only learned about the incident from a parent, raising concerns about the safety and well-being of the children at camp.

4. Unauthorized Visitors (7.17.2024)

Non-authorized visitors were present at camp, violating safety protocols and potentially creating liability for the town.

5. Field Trip Ticket Issue (7.17.2024)

Tickets for multiple camps were mistakenly given in one envelope without instructions, causing confusion and delays. Camp Directors had to count the tickets themselves during busy drop-off hours. The Department Head instructed Recreation Supervisors to provide counted and separated tickets in advance for future trips to improve efficiency and prevent disruptions.

6. T-Shirt and Uniform Problems

There were several issues with camp T-shirt orders, including ill-fitting shirts for campers and insufficient shirts for staff. Some Recreation Supervisors ordered shirts only for themselves in unapproved colors, and other staff members did not receive staff polos.

7. Incorrect Timesheets (7.24.2024)

Recreation Supervisors submitted incorrect timesheets stating 45 hours worked. After being informed by the Department Head, they corrected the timesheets to reflect 40 hours, as per the union contract, on 7.25.2024, but added the phrase "under duress" at the signature line.

Write Up Related Grievance Proceedings [Appendix C 254-287]

8-16-24 Employee Contract Grievance Step 1

On August 16, 2024, Johnson and Lowry filed a grievance Bivens for the written warning. These actions were claimed to be a violation of the Collective Bargaining Agreement's disciplinary guidelines.

8/28/24 Supervisor outreach to schedule meeting related to Step 1 grievance

Bivens sent an email to Johnson, J. Wilson, and K. Catalioto, asking for their availability to meet in order to continue with the grievance process.

MPP 35409 – Hearing Scheduled 9/27/24

The document alleges that the Town of Hamden engaged in prohibited practices under the Municipal Employees Relations Act by retaliating against Lowry and Johnson, after they filed a Bullying and Harassment complaint on August 1, 2024.

The Union claims that these actions were in retaliation for the harassment complaint and had a detrimental impact on the bargaining unit. They argue that the Town's actions violate the duty to bargain in good faith and constitute prohibited practices under the Municipal Employees Relations Act.

Step 2 Grievance Response

On October 25, 2024, Kasey Catalioto emailed Dan Bonfiglio regarding the Step 2 grievances filed by Lowry and Johnson. After reviewing the case, it was determined that discipline was warranted due to the employees not meeting clear expectations in July. However, to improve their working relationship with their supervisor, the Town offered to resolve the grievances by allowing the discipline to be removed from their files after one year, provided they attend a coaching meeting with their supervisor to discuss expectations. Catalioto asked Bonfiglio to review the proposed agreement and discuss it with Lowry and Johnson.

Hamden Parks & Recreation Step 2 Grievance [9-11-2024]

Bivens' grievance is consistent with the one stated in Step 1, with the added claim that Johnson failed to provide counted and separated tickets to camp directors and did not distribute the tickets before the day of the field trip.

Declined Settlement Agreement re grievance 10-26-24

The Settlement Agreement between the Town of Hamden, the Union, and Johnson outlined that a counseling session and written expectations would be provided to Johnson. Additionally, the Town proposed that if the behaviors were corrected the written warning would be removed from Johnson's file in one year. Johnson declined to accept the agreement.

Step 3 Arbitration Hamden UPSEU 2025-A-0082 –12/9/24

The Board received the Union's request to arbitrate the grievance(s).

ANALYSIS/FACTUAL CLAIMS DURING NLI INVESTIGATION

The following incidents were discussed during interviews with Lowry and Johnson:

- Camp Lake Compounce Tickets
 - Johnson claimed that a counselor Aiden and another counselor, whose name she could not remember, but she knows his face, were given the tickets to bring to the Camp Director
 - Lowry said Aiden and her grandson Lamont were given the tickets to bring to Camp Director Witness #2.
 - Lowry said that Witness #2 was contacted and advised that the tickets were being delivered by Lamont and Aiden.
 - Witness #2 stated that the tickets were very expensive and there was a concern by Bivens when she learned that a counselor, Lowry's grandson, was tasked with handling and delivering the tickets instead of a supervisor.

To date, neither Johnson nor Lowry have addressed Bivens' concerns that the tickets were not separated and delivered with an account for each camp by a Recreation Supervisor.

- Fight at Camp Gym
 - Johnson stated that she was notified by Lowry of the incident involving Lamont and she responded because she is Lamont’s supervisor
 - Johnson said she arrived at the camp at same time as Bivens
 - Lowry stated that it is the Camp Directors responsibility to inform Bivens any incidents at Camp
 - Lowry also stated that she was not aware that a basketball had been scheduled

There appears to be chain of command confusion related to this issue. Lowry believes it is the Camp Director’s responsibility to report emergent issues at camp to Bivens. Bivens claims she instructed Lowry and Johnson to immediately report emergent issues to her following the emergency water shut off issue on 7/2/24.

- Camp T-Shirts
 - **Witness #2** said there are ongoing issues with receiving an adequate order and sizes for the camps attendees and staff.
 - **Witness #6** stated that Bivens’ instructions to Johnson were clear and Johnson did not follow them.
 - During her interview, Lowry stated that T-shirt ordering was all Johnson and Abdul.
 - During Johnson’s interview, she stated that Lowry historically ordered different color shirts for staff based on awareness months celebrated in Town such as Alzheimer’s and autism awareness.

Lowry did seem to have an influence on Johnson’s decision to order the pink and purple polo shirts for themselves as a past practice.

- Time sheet issue
 - Lowry said she 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.

Lowry did present as genuinely confused with the implemented changes.

MPP35527 –Filed 01/08/25 [Appendix C 289-292]

This document alleges that the Town of Hamden violated the Municipal Employee Relations Act by unilaterally changing the working conditions of Recreation Supervisors Lowry and Johnson. On December 13, 2024, they were directed by Bivens, to perform custodial duties, such as removing, cleaning, and changing approximately 30 tables at the Senior Center Services Building, a task typically handled by custodial staff. The Union claims this change negatively impacted the bargaining unit and constitutes a refusal to bargain in good faith.

Analysis

During her interview, Lowry stated that she, **“is not a maid here.”** Lowry also said she **has no problem helping when she is as to respectfully.** Her perception is that Bivens demeaned her by demanding she perform custodial work.

This was a joint complaint with Johnson. **Johnson** also stated that she **has no issues with pitching in** and **believes that as a supervisor it is her responsibility** to do so.

This complaint is based on Lowry's perception that she was not asked to wipe tables in a respectful way and that she was treated like a maid.

Witness #8 stated that the State advised the Union to withdraw the complaint and that it was being dismissed as frivolous.

MPP Number Not Yet Assigned - 01.27.2025 [Appendix C, 300-303]

The document alleges that the Town of Hamden violated the Municipal Employees Relations Act by unilaterally changing the working conditions for Recreation Supervisors Johnson and Lowry. On December 31, 2024, the supervisors were directed by the Town's Director, Bivens, to be on-call and take their work phones home to monitor for call-outs, weather-related issues, and program cancellations. The Union claims that this change negatively impacted the bargaining unit and constitutes a refusal to bargain in good faith. The Union requests remedies including an order for the Town to cease the practice, compensation for affected employees, and payment of attorney's fees.

Status: Pending Hearing

Analysis

- Under Lowry's description, Working Conditions and Schedule, she is required to be available for programming needs on evening, weekend and holidays.
- Must be available for work during **evenings, weekends, and holidays**, as required by program needs.

INVESTIGATIVE FINDINGS

Subject: Recreation Supervisor Sallie Lowry

Supervisor Involved: Karen Bivens, Director of Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness

Investigation Conducted by: New Light Investigations, LLC

Location: Town of Hamden, Connecticut

Report Finalization Date: April 11, 2025

I. Scope of Investigation

This investigation was initiated to evaluate the credibility of allegations made by Recreation Supervisor Sallie Lowry against her supervisor, Director Karen Bivens. The scope of the investigation included a thorough review of internal complaint filings, documentation, relevant witness interviews, departmental policies, disciplinary actions, and union grievance procedures. Particular attention was given to Lowry's history of complaints, her work performance, her interactions with coworkers and Director Bivens, and the potential overlap between the timing of her disciplinary actions and subsequent grievance filings.

The investigation also assessed whether Lowry's decision to decline mediation—while within her rights—may have limited the opportunity for constructive conflict resolution. The pattern and timing of complaint filings were critically analyzed to determine whether they reflect proactive reporting of misconduct or reactive resistance to supervisory authority.

II. Summary of Allegations by Sallie Lowry

Sallie Lowry, a veteran employee and Recreation Supervisor for the Town of Hamden's Department of Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness, filed a series of complaints against her direct supervisor, Director Karen Bivens. The core of her allegations centers around a pattern of perceived supervisory misconduct, including:

- Hostile Work Environment
- Disrespect and Micromanagement
- Age-Based Targeting
- Racial Disparity in Oversight
- Disregard for Employee Input
- Retaliatory Practices

Lowry described being subjected to racial and generational disrespect, including incidents in which she was singled out to perform tasks not asked of others and questioned about retirement after seeking a leadership role. She also reported that her input was routinely dismissed, and her authority as a seasoned supervisor was undermined.

III. Review of Complaint Activity by Lowry

Sallie Lowry is a primary complainant in a pattern of formal and informal grievance activity between 2023 and 2025. She made multiple individual complaints and also participated in joint filings alongside co-worker Nichole Johnson.

A. Complaint Volume & Classification [Exhibit 1]

- Individual Complaints: 15+

- Joint Complaints (with Johnson): 58
- Union Grievances Filed: 4 (Documented)
- CHRO Filing: 1
- Mediation Offered: Yes (declined)

B. Timing & Patterns

One of Lowry’s union grievances was filed *after* she received a disciplinary warning. A mediation opportunity was extended in response to that grievance; however, Lowry declined to participate in the offered resolution session. While declining mediation is within her rights, the timing of the grievance raises concerns about whether the complaint may have been retaliatory or defensive rather than proactive.

This pattern—grievance filed after disciplinary action—may suggest that at least one formal complaint was used as a response mechanism rather than as a pre-emptive report of workplace misconduct.

IV. Credibility of Allegations Against Karen Bivens

The credibility of Lowry’s allegations varies widely depending on the specific incident. Some complaint incidents are supported by corroborative witness statements, such as reactive or dismissive tone by Bivens at times, while others lack sufficient documentation or contrast with verified policy, supervisory authority and witness observations.

A. Substantiated

- **Dismissive Tone:** In the documentation provided by Lowry in **Exhibit 13**, the 2023 Human resources investigation [**Appendix C 151-186**], statements by **Johnson** and **Witness #9**, other individuals reported instances of poor or dismissive reactions and/or communications by Bivens, not exclusively Lowry. These complaints and statements present as limited and situational, not pervasive or consistent. These limited observations are not actionable misconduct, however, they are fueling Lowry’s perceptions that Bivens is generally disrespectful.

B. Unsubstantiated or Contextually Challenged Allegations

- **Micromanagement:** Bivens admitted that she has to ask Lowry, Johnson and Witness #9 for additional details and review their work more closely. She contends that they are not forthcoming with details and do not exercise due diligence.
- **Generational Comment:** The retiring remark, “When are you retiring?” or “I’ll retire when you retire,” is disputed both in context and words.
- **Racial Discrimination:** No direct or repeated use of racially derogatory terms or explicitly racist directives was reported by other witnesses. Witnesses testified to Bivens inclusively. Lowry, herself, spoke to Bivens about diversity and inclusive programming.
- **Hostile Work Environment:** Perceptions of tension and hostility appear mutual and entangled in interpersonal conflict rather than arising solely from Bivens’ conduct. Bivens has withdrawn from the recreation department in order to minimize conflict.

While some concerns by Lowry have elements of credibility, particularly regarding perceived criticism, reactive tone and unclear expectations in certain circumstances, broader claims of systemic harassment, targeted mistreatment or racial discrimination are not substantial and have significant opposing witness testimony. Many witnesses claimed that Lowry is hostile to Bivens.

V. Witness Testimony

Multiple witness interviews provide a nuanced understanding of the workplace dynamics between Sallie Lowry and Karen Bivens.

- **Witness #2:** Lowry is engaged in a power struggle with Bivens. Lowry has been seen as the boss and running Recreation in the context of her long-term employment. Johnson and Lowry are bonded together against Bivens.
- **Witness #5** Lowry and Johnson air their complaints, vent and there is sometimes a racial element to it. Lowry and Johnson have called Bivens a bitch.
- **Witness #6:** Lowry and Johnson push back on Bivens' directives. Bivens has difficulty managing the department due to the lack of cooperation.
- **Witness #7:** There is a constant back and forth; a tug of war. Lowry and Johnson team up against Bivens, two against one. Bivens has been alienated from the recreation office.
- **Witness #8:** Lowry "often used her seniority to bypass chain-of-command." Lowry and Johnson have alienated Bivens from the office with their insubordination and hostility.
- **Witness #9:** Bivens is dismissive and "micromanages" her.
- **Witness #12:** Lowry might be struggling with the changes in the department, which could be affecting her willingness to adapt to new processes or leadership styles. Lowry and Johnson question Bivens instructions and directives, even when they do not need to be questioned. They are very critical of Bivens in private conversation.
- **Witness #13:** Lowry and Johnson make frequent negative comments about Bivens and call her derogatory names.
- **Johnson:** Admitted that she ignores Bivens and does not acknowledge her.

VI. Witness Assessments of Lowry's Behavior

The majority of witnesses characterized Lowry as a deeply experienced professional with historical knowledge of departmental operations—but also described her behavior as reactive, and hostile.

- Witnesses acknowledged that Lowry would often "go back and forth" with Bivens during meetings, resist new directives, and rely heavily on her past practices.
- Co-complainant Nichole Johnson, described Lowry as her main emotional support and advocate in the workplace
- Several colleagues rely heavily on Lowry's assistance to execute their job functions
- [REDACTED]
- A recurring theme from witnesses was Lowry's tendency to challenge Bivens' legitimacy as a supervisor, often questioning decisions in front of peers or via written protest.

VII. Analysis of Performance and Accountability Avoidance

Evidence suggests that Lowry, while competent in her role, demonstrated recurring patterns of resistance to administrative change and authority under Bivens.

- **Job Confusion:** There was no documented job role clarification post-reorganization, contributing to confusion around supervisory limits.
- **Retaliatory Complaints:** At least one grievance appears to have been submitted in close proximity to a disciplinary incident, suggesting possible use as a deflection mechanism.
- **Mediation Declined:** Her refusal to engage in mediation may have blocked potential conflict resolution.
- **Seniority Asserted:** Lowry frequently invoked her tenure as justification for ignoring revised protocols.

Lowry's resistance may stem from her frustration from not being able to understand her job function and new technological practices needed. This was further exacerbated by her perceiving that she was being personally disrespected by Bivens but some of her responses—including formal complaints timed around discipline and instruction—may indicate avoidance of accountability that likely stemmed from her lack of training for her job duties and her unwillingness to adapt to the newer and modified job functions to include technology integration. It appears that Lowry may have filed complaints to escalate disputes rather than to find constructive ways to resolve them internally in order to get better clarification about her job duties. Moreover, the volume and timing suggest a potential pattern of complaint usage as a deflection mechanism to avoid managerial scrutiny or job performance issues.

VIII. Conclusion

A. Overall Finding

Sallie Lowry's complaints contain concerns regarding supervisory communication, perceived marginalization, and unclear expectations. However, these complaints are significantly weakened by:

- Her visible resistance to administrative oversight
- Her decision to decline mediation despite being offered the option
- A pattern of complaints being filed in reaction to instruction and disciplinary measures
- Witness descriptions of emotionally charged interactions with Bivens and public withdrawal from cooperative tasks
- Her efforts to recruit other employees to align against Bivens' decisions

B. Recommendations

- Conflict Resolution Training for both parties
- Additional HR support for Bivens with regards to progressive discipline for employee behavior issues
- **Written Role Clarification** for Recreation Supervisors
- Quarterly Supervisor Check-ins with Human Resources
- **Union Training Session** on productive grievance filing and employee accountability

Interpretation Of Complaint Timing

Sallie Lowry is a Recreation Supervisor and a veteran employee with over 30 years of service to the Town of Hamden, alleges **discrimination, retaliation, and a hostile work environment** under the supervision of **Karen Bivens**, Director of Arts, Culture, Recreation & Wellness. The purpose of this analysis is to assess the **timing, tone, and trajectory** of Lowry's

complaint behavior and determine whether there is evidence suggesting her filings were **proactive efforts to address misconduct**, or **reactive attempts to resist or counteract supervisory accountability**.

The review includes Lowry's **CHRO filings (2 total)**, union grievances (4 formally documented with one escalated to arbitration), her disciplinary record (1 written warning issued August 16, 2024), and interview testimony (2 separate investigative interviews in 2025). Additionally, the record reflects **61 total complaints** involving Lowry between **October 2022 and March 2025**, including **3 individual complaints** and **58 joint complaints** in collaboration with colleague **Nichole Johnson**.

This investigation has not discovered any evidence nor was any evidence presented that Karen Bivens has ever used derogatory or inappropriate language toward Lowry, nor were there documented violations on Bivens' part rising to the level of harassment or discrimination.

Other critical observations include Lowry's refusal to engage in offered mediation, her **self-acknowledged intentional resistance** to Director Bivens' authority, and her repeated and deliberate use of **racially provocative terminology**—specifically referring to Bivens as a **“Slave Master.”** This reflects a **targeted attempt to racialize the power dynamic** and appears to have been a **calculated effort** by Lowry to frame the supervisory relationship in a manner that would **intensify conflict along racial lines** and **galvanize support** from the African American colleagues that Lowry attempted to recruit as additional complainants. Lowry's actions and workplace behavior reveal **deeper strategic motivations** behind her complaint behavior. This use of charged language is a **significant factor** in evaluating both the **intensity** and **intent** behind her actions regarding her complaints. This further supports the interpretation that **Lowry's grievances may have functioned as a coercive strategy to resist accountability, create supervisory fatigue, and avoid managerial oversight.**

Summary of Complaint Behavior and Patterns

Sallie Lowry's pattern of complaint behavior is extensive and spans multiple categories:

- **Individual Complaints Filed:** 3 formally documented personal complaints
- **Joint Complaints with Nichole Johnson:** 58 total entries over 2+ years
- **CHRO Filing:** Filed June 2023 (alleging age discrimination and retaliation)
- **Disciplinary Action:** Written Warning issued August 16, 2024
- **Grievance Filings:** Step 1 (August 20, 2024) and Step 2 (September 11, 2024)
- **Mediation Offered:** October 2024 (Lowry declined participation)
- **Arbitration Initiated:** December 9, 2024 (Step 3 filing)
- **MPP Filing:** January 8, 2025 (Claims of direction to perform custodial duties)
- **MPP Filing:** January 27, 2025 (Claims of unilateral change in working conditions, directions to check cell phones off hours for inclement weather and call outs)

A notable pattern emerges when examining the sequence of events: **Lowry's most active grievance escalation occurred immediately after receiving formal discipline**, including filing an MPP (prohibited practice) claim just **four days** after the written warning. Her grievances frequently followed **performance reviews, program disputes, or disciplinary conversations**, rather than preceding them—suggesting a reactive complaint pattern. Additionally, Lowry obtained several character statements following the August 16, 2024 writeup further supporting reactive and defensive pattern of behavior. **[Exhibit 13]**

Additionally, during two formal interviews, Lowry admitted to being **“purposely resistant”** to Director Bivens' leadership. She further characterized Bivens—who is of **Asian racial identity**—

as a “**Slave Master**,” a term rooted in racial and historical trauma for African Americans. This language suggests an emotionally charged perception of the supervisory relationship, potentially rooted in power dynamics, generational differences, and racial identity conflicts.

Targeted Examples and Analysis

1. CHRO Complaint (June 5, 2023)

- Filed **before** formal discipline
- Alleged age discrimination, citing being passed over for promotion
- **Analysis:** Likely motivated by perceived injustice, not directly tied to disciplinary action

2. Grievance Filing – Step 1 (August 20, 2024)

- Filed **four days after** a written warning was issued. Lowry also solicited character statements for herself following the write-up. **[Exhibit 13]**
- **Analysis:** This grievance and efforts following the write-up appears **reactive**, aiming to invalidate or undermine the disciplinary record

3. Declined Mediation (October 2024)

- Town offered to resolve the grievance with performance coaching and removal of the warning after 1 year
- Lowry declined, escalating the issue to arbitration
- **Analysis:** While refusal is her legal right, it shows a pattern of **escalation rather than reconciliation**

- MPP Filing (January 8, 2025)

- Lowry and Johnson filed a complaint that Bivens asked them to wipe tables and change tablecloths for the Silver Bells event. Lowry claimed **she “is not a maid here.”**
- **Analysis:** Indicates a **deeply personal and racialized framing** of the conflict, contributing to emotional intensity and strategic timing

- MPP Filing (January 7, 2025)

- Lowry and Johnson filed a complaint that Bivens that Bivens directed them to take their work cellphone homes and check on evenings and weekends for inclement weather changes to programming and employee call outs.
- **Analysis:** Shows a pattern of **escalation rather than reconciliation**

6. “Slave Master” Terminology (February 2025 Interview)

- Lowry described Bivens using the term “slave master,” citing racialized power imbalance
- **Analysis:** Indicates a **deeply personal and racialized framing** of the conflict, contributing to emotional intensity and strategic timing

7. Use of Complaints as Strategy

- Witness testimony and internal memos describe Lowry as influential and experienced but resistant to evolving job duties, especially those requiring digital systems

- Analysis: Complaints were sometimes used as a mechanism for asserting control, resisting change, or retaliating against perceived slights

Investigator’s Conclusion

The evidence demonstrates that Sallie Lowry’s pattern of complaint behavior was not random or purely reactive to workplace injustice—it was, at times, strategic, emotionally charged, and personally motivated. Her own admission that she was “purposely resistant” to authority—combined with racially loaded language and timing of filings—strongly suggests that grievances were used in some cases to assert personal control, avoid accountability, or amplify administrative tension.

While Lowry’s early complaints (e.g., CHRO filing) may reflect genuine feelings of exclusion or perceptions of age bias, the **later escalation of complaints post-discipline**, the **decline of mediation**, and the **racialized framing of her supervisor** point to a pattern that increasingly took on elements of **resistance politics rather than constructive advocacy**.

INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS

Allegations Against Karen Bivens

This report presents a comprehensive and professionally structured analysis of the formal workplace allegations submitted by Sallie Lowry against her supervisor, Director Karen Bivens. Each allegation has been carefully reviewed in light of all interviews, exhibits, union grievance records, and CHRO complaints. Importantly, this analysis concludes that while Bivens' management style may have been stern, direct, or emotionally distant, her behavior does not constitute a violation of the Town of Hamden’s municipal policies, Connecticut State Labor Law, or Federal Employment Law.

This report further finds no demonstrable evidence that Bivens engaged in discriminatory, retaliatory, or harassing conduct that rose to the level of legal or policy infractions. It is particularly noteworthy that the issues cited by Lowry and co-complainant Nichole Johnson were not widely echoed by other employees in the department, many of whom declined to support the complaints or expressed contrary views in interviews. Therefore, while the complaints detail interpersonal friction and communication challenges, the investigative findings support the conclusion that Director Bivens exercised managerial authority within appropriate professional boundaries. This report is formatted for consideration in formal HR review, municipal risk assessment, and internal procedural audit.

Legal and Policy References:

- **Town of Hamden Personnel Policy Manual** – Supervisory standards and employee conduct [**Exhibit 14**]
- **UPSEU Local 424, Unit 36 – Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA)** – Articles governing grievance procedures and supervisory authority [**Exhibit 15**]
- **Connecticut General Statutes Title 31 & Title 46a** – Employment standards, retaliation, and discrimination
- **Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964** – Workplace discrimination and hostile environment standards [**Exhibit 16**]

- **CHRO & EEOC Hostile Work Environment Guidelines** – Definitions of severe/pervasive conduct [Exhibit 17]

Allegation 1: Hostile Work Environment Claim:

Lowry described persistent tension and a toxic work atmosphere perpetuated by Director Bivens.

Findings: Witness testimony confirmed instances of interpersonal friction; however, these were mainly isolated to interactions with Lowry and Johnson. Other employees did not report a hostile workplace under Bivens supervision.

Conclusion: Unsubstantiated – No evidence was broad or pervasive hostile conditions were identified department-wide. Management behavior did not violate legal or policy standards.

Allegation 2: Discriminatory Behavior and Unequal Treatment Claim:

Lowry cited exclusion from meetings, communication via intermediaries, and inconsistent levels of respect.

Findings: Testimony shows Bivens maintained consistently professional communication standards. No statements or behavior were identified as discriminatory or unlawful under relevant statutes.

Conclusion: Unsubstantiated – While communication styles varied, there is no evidence of unlawful discrimination.

Allegation 3: Retaliation and Intimidation Claim:

Lowry believed she was retaliated against following her complaints, including increased scrutiny and workload.

Findings: The investigation did not identify any causal link between Lowry's complaints and subsequent job assignments or scrutiny. No violation of anti-retaliation statutes was found.

Conclusion: Unsubstantiated – No evidence supports a finding of retaliatory motive or behavior.

Allegation 4: Workplace Bullying and Psychological Harm Claim:

Lowry, Johnson and one witness reported emotional harm due to interactions with Bivens.

Findings: Emotional responses to management style were subjective and not echoed broadly by staff. No behavior rose to the threshold of psychological workplace abuse.

Conclusion: Unsubstantiated – Workplace tone and emotional perceptions are not actionable under current municipal or state standards.

Allegation 5: Exclusion from Duties and Communications Claim:

Lowry stated she was excluded from responsibilities tied to her role.

Findings: Organizational restructuring and communication flow were within managerial discretion. No evidence suggests exclusion was targeted or punitive.

Conclusion: Unsubstantiated – Managerial decisions were within normal operational boundaries.

Allegation 6: Failure to Investigate or Intervene in Claim:

Lowry alleged Human Resources did not address ongoing issues.

Findings: Documentation and interviews indicate complaints were logged and monitored. Delays in intervention may reflect administrative backlog, not neglect or misconduct.

Conclusion: Unsubstantiated – No procedural violations by Human Resources were identified.

Final Determination

The investigative record does not support the claim that Director Karen Bivens violated any Town of Hamden municipal policy, State of Connecticut labor regulation, or Federal employment law. While elements of management style and interpersonal conflict were observed, they do not meet the legal or procedural thresholds required for disciplinary or administrative corrective action.

INVESTIGATIVE SUMMARY

This investigative summary provides a consolidated overview of the core allegations made by Sallie Lowry against Director Karen Bivens. The investigation was conducted by New Light Investigations and included the review of complaint documentation, employee interviews, CHRO filings, union grievance records, job descriptions, and Town of Hamden personnel policies. The analysis concludes that while interpersonal conflict and managerial communication tensions were present, **no municipal, state, or federal policy violations were substantiated**. The following findings reflect each core allegation:

Allegation Category	Investigative Finding
Hostile Work Environment	Not Substantiated
Discriminatory Behavior and Unequal Treatment	Not Substantiated
Retaliation and Intimidation	Not Substantiated
Workplace Bullying and Psychological Harm	Not Substantiated
Exclusion from Duties and Communications	Not Substantiated
Failure to Investigate or Intervene (HR)	Not Substantiated

The investigation further finds that:

- Director Bivens' management style, while described by some as direct or stern, did not rise to the level of a hostile or discriminatory work environment as defined under state or federal employment law.
- Witnesses provided conflicting testimony to Lowry's claims, with a number of staff members either declining to support the allegations or contradicting them.
- There is evidence suggesting that the complainants, Lowry and Johnson, may have engaged in efforts to resist supervision and workplace changes.
- There is no indication that Bivens' actions constituted retaliation or policy violations under CHRO or CBA grievance standards.

This report is suitable for use by the Town of Hamden HR Department, legal counsel, and arbitration panels in defense of the municipality's supervisory practices. It supports the conclusion that Director Karen Bivens acted within the professional scope of her duties and did not violate applicable laws or policies.

Policy and Legal Citations for Reference:

1. **Town of Hamden Personnel Policy Manual** – Sections governing conduct, supervisory standards, and disciplinary protocols.
2. **Collective Bargaining Agreement (UPSEU Local 424, Unit 36)** – Articles related to grievance procedures, employee discipline, and management rights.
3. Connecticut General Statutes – Title 31 (Labor):
 - §31-51m – Whistleblower protections (no violations triggered)
 - §46a-60 – Discriminatory employment practices (no substantiated violation)
4. Federal Law:
 - Title VII, Civil Rights Act of 1964 – Harassment and discrimination (no substantiated violation)
 - Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) standards on hostile work environment (no violations triggered)
5. CHRO Guidelines:
 - Hostile Work Environment Criteria – Must include pervasive, severe, or targeted conduct (not met)

Archiving & Record Retention

- All witness interview notes have been retained and electronically archived and cataloged in the investigation record.
- All documents submitted as exhibits are cataloged in the investigation record.
- Audio recordings (if applicable) are archived securely and are not available review unless legally required.

End Report