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August 16, 2011

Chief George Turner  
Atlanta Police Department  
226 Peachtree Street, S.W.  
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

RE: Complaint of Tamla Watkins, #10-32

Dear Chief Turner:

The Atlanta Citizen Review Board (“ACRB”) completed its investigation and adjudication of the complaint that was filed by Tamla Watkins alleging false arrest by Officer Larry Bennett. The allegations were investigated by Sheena Robertson based on a timely complaint filed by Ms. Watkins.

Ms. Watkins filed a complaint alleging that on January 7, 2010, Atlanta Police Officer Larry Bennett falsely arrested and charged her with Criminal Trespass on January 7, 2010. The matter was suspended until the conclusion of her criminal case. On March 11, 2011, the criminal prosecution was placed in “dead docket” and the investigation was commenced.

Ms. Watkins was interviewed when she made her complaint in July 2010. She said that she called 911 to report that her ex-husband, Mario Watkins, the assistant principal at Dobbs Elementary School had stolen her car keys. She was instructed to wait outside the school for police and she, along with her parents and two sons, drove to Dobbs to wait for the police. She said when they arrived, her father parked outside of the gate and when two Atlanta Police Officers arrived, they proceeded to drive through the gate. Those officers were James Stock and Kenya Manson. Ms. Watkins explained that as they were entering the school, her ex-husband came out and saw them and ran back in. The officer began to take her complaint and while she was speaking with the officers, three other officers arrived and one was Officer Larry Bennett. She alleged that her ex-husband and Officer Bennett are friends and she believes her ex-husband called him to come to the school. She said that Officer Bennett went inside the school and returned with a fake Temporary Restraining Order and when that happened, Officer Manson and Stock told her to step out of her car and get into the backseat of their patrol car. They ran a check and tried to find out if there was a valid restraining order and this was negative. They were going to release her, however, Officer Bennett told the officers that the principal wanted Ms. Watkins arrested because she had previously been issued a criminal trespass warning.

*Continue on...*

The police report associated with this arrest indicates that Dana Evans, the principal said Tamla Watkins was issued a trespass warning on October 4, 2009 after acting disorderly to employees on the campus. It also alleged that she returned to the school acting in a disorderly fashion and ignoring the warnings. The 911 tapes indicate that Ms. Watkins called 911 on January 7, 2010 at 5:25 p.m. and said that she was reporting her car stolen and needed the police to meet her at the school in order to get her keys. Mario Watkins called 911 at 5:35 p.m. and reported that Ms. Watkins and her parents were at the school trying to fight with him. Officer Manson arrived at 5:44 p.m. and Officer Bennett arrived at 5:48 p.m.

Edward and Mattie Smith, Tamla Watkins' parents, corroborated Ms. Watkins' version of the events; however, Dana Evans, the Principal at Dobbs, advised she received a telephone call from Mario Watkins informing her that Ms. Watkins and her parents were at the school threatening. She instructed Mario that he should call the School Detective Unit and she returned to the school. When she arrived, Ms. Evans told the police she wanted her (*Tamla*) off of the property and that she had previously informed Ms. Watkins to stay away from the school.

Another teacher at the school, Ms. Patricia MacNintch, was interviewed. She corroborated Mr. Watkins' version of the events and observed Ms. Watkins jump out of her car, approach Mario and begin to scream and argue. She said she saw one of the women strike Mario in the back of the head. This was before the police responded.

The three involved officers were interviewed. Officer Kenya Manson said she responded to a radio call and when she arrived, she was approached by Ms. Watkins. She was informed that there was an issue involving the car keys and wanted to get the keys from her ex-husband. She spoke with Mr. Watkins and he informed her that Ms. Watkins tried to attack him and Ms. Watkins was not supposed to be on the property. Mr. Watkins showed her a TPO issued by Fayette County. Ms. Watkins said it was not in effect, so she checked on its status. The School Detective Unit was notified and Officer Bennett arrived. He went inside the building and reviewed the surveillance video. The video revealed that Ms. Watkins had been on the property arguing with her ex-husband prior to the arrival of the police.

Officer Stock and Officer Bennett corroborated the statement of Mr. Watkins, Ms. Evans, and Officer Manson. Additionally, Officer Bennett confirmed the video had recorded Ms. Watkins enter onto the school's property prior to the arrival of the police. Another person, Connie Blackwell, also viewed the video. He also confirmed that Ms. Evans had issued a stay away order to Ms. Watkins on a previous occasion. Officer Bennett indicated that he does not have a personal relationship with Mr. Watkins.

Based on the above information, the Board voted five in favor with one abstention to recommend a finding of **Exonerated** to the allegation of False Arrest made against Officer Larry Bennett.

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Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns or if you would like to have a copy of the full investigation. The ordinance requires the Chief to respond in writing regarding which recommendations are accepted, rejected, or will be implemented with modifications within thirty (30) days of the submission of a recommendation for action by the Board to the Chief. See Sec. 2-2211(O) of Ordinance 07-0-0141.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joy Morrissey".

Joy Morrissey,  
Board Chair

cc: Mayor Kasim Reed  
Council President Ceasar Mitchell  
Members of Atlanta City Council  
ACRB Members