

COMPLAINT

6/28/17

After beginning my tenure on the Gateway Neighborhood Response Squad in September 2014, I feel I have been subjected to a significant amount of mistreatment, isolation, and retaliatory acts for standing up to inappropriate behavior and bringing my concerns to my supervisors. Based on the totality of the circumstances, I feel *some* of these instances have discriminated against me based on my gender as a woman. I feel the current state of the Gateway Neighborhood Response Squad is a hostile work environment that is affecting the entire squad negatively. The Professional Standards Unit was previously given a folder detailing a timeline of events that illustrate examples of what has occurred during my assignment on Gateway NRS. I believe there have been significant issues that arise to the level of bullying and retaliation that have been allowed to persist, become acceptable, and ultimately resulted from ineffective leadership and supervision.

I knew there was significant dysfunction on this squad prior to my arrival in 2014. It was my hope to be a part of the squad's restoration and long-term success. I have always had an appreciation for the capabilities of NRS, and I feel this type of squad is able to directly impact specific communities in a positive way. I respect the importance of community and intelligence-led policing. In going to Gateway NRS, I was hopeful I could be a successful addition to the current squad members. I believed I brought a specific skill set to the squad that would be beneficial to the momentum and success of NRS.

I was hopeful I would be accepted as a member of 'the team' upon my arrival; however, this was not the case. I believed the veteran officer on the squad, Matt Schneider, made it well known from the beginning he would not accept my joining the squad. I feel I endured significant isolation from this person, and I am still unclear 2 years and 9 months later where his vendetta against me began. After enduring numerous inappropriate incidents as detailed in my timeline, I have drawn my own conclusions as to why this treatment has occurred. I believe Officer Schneider has an established PATTERN of mistreating or dismissing females, many of whom were colleagues of his. There had been other females on Gateway NRS previously, and in my opinion, they were never fully accepted or treated the same as the males on the squad. I think it is of particular importance that Officer Schneider is the biggest perpetrator of squad divisiveness on NRS. He is the most veteran officer on this squad, and he has a span of influence to junior members of the squad. Unfortunately, Officer Schneider's actions have modeled inappropriate behavior to other male squad members, particularly when it comes to treatment of a female co-worker.

When I ultimately was granted my first mediation with Officer Schneider in 2015, he admitted he had treated me "like shit" and it was not deserved. He was only able to say that I "annoyed" him despite him creating very little opportunity for me to have contact with him. For Officer Schneider to not be able to cite any significant issue that started this problem, I feel he was simply unwilling to include another female on 'his squad'. I have personally seen Officer Schneider take some of his free time to 'show the ropes' to a new male patrol officer whom he did not even know. Unfortunately, Officer Schneider never afforded me the same mentoring opportunity or expressed any interest in facilitating my success in NRS. Other NRS officers, both male and female, have had a similar complaint that Officer Schneider puts very little value in his role or responsibility as the senior officer on the squad.

I have always been a person to stand up for what was right. I saw early on that our squad was not working to its full potential. I believed a large percentage of this was occurring because Officer Schneider was intentionally not participating in the decided direction of the squad. Officer Schneider made it very apparent he did not agree with the new direction from our Command, and he frequently made very overt attempts to continue doing what he wanted to do, even if that was in opposition to the squad. I was vocal about how our squad needed to be a better team and everyone needed to participate in the squad's success.

In doing so, I believe Officer Schneider's hatred for me grew even greater because it was clear I did not support his immaturity.

Ultimately, Officer Schneider not only isolated himself from me, but he dismissed my existence altogether. He has failed to show me the slightest bit of professional respect. I have repeatedly greeted the entire squad in the office, and he intentionally says nothing in response to me. Officer Schneider frequently dismisses telephone or email correspondence from me despite its work-related content. I feel he has intentionally undermined my investigations, engaged in sabotage of another female officer's case, knowingly compromised important cases I have been involved with, spoken disrespectfully to me in front of my male peers, defamed my reputation, and engaged in bullying behavior that has subjected me to significant stress and anxiety. As the veteran "example" I believe Officer Schneider's behavior has a significant negative impact on the rest of the group. I feel Officer Schneider's mistreatment of me has affected my work performance, my relationship with other squad members, and my overall quality of life and health.

Being someone to stand up for myself, I would bring certain concerns to my supervisor(s). I made it very clear I did not want to make a formal complaint, but I wanted them to know what was occurring and that I thought it was inappropriate. I was quickly labeled by Officer Schneider as a tattletale who was ill-equipped to handle problems on my own. I felt his passive aggressive attacks only grew, and I felt this was in retaliation for bringing concerns to my supervisor. Bullying behavior was addressed with Officer Schneider by Sgt. Shoop and Lt. Montgomery. Although Officer Schneider asserts he has never bullied me or ever taken full responsibility for his actions, this topic was addressed with him previously. However, I have been subjected to numerous passive aggressive comments from Officer Schneider regarding me believing he was a bully. These comments were said in front of my peers and made me very uncomfortable. I felt Officer Schneider saying these things further isolated me and was his attempt to defame me as the whistleblower to his behavior.

Over the years, I have attempted to find common ground with Officer Schneider. I have voiced my desire to Officer Schneider, the squad, and my supervisors that I only desired peace and wanted to move forward in a healthy direction. I have tried to converse with Officer Schneider. I have offered to ride with Officer Schneider. I have tried to be sympathetic to personal issues he was going through to include offering to help him and give advice. I have repeatedly tried 'taking the high road' with him with little success. Officer Schneider still actively dismisses me and has REFUSED to work with me. He has voiced this refusal to another squad member who told others on the squad. This refusal was in response and retaliation to Officer Schneider believing I was going to make a formal complaint after he pulled my chair out from behind me, and I fell to the ground. I had done everything to avoid making a formal complaint to that point, but I still felt Officer Schneider was punishing me for trying to address his inappropriate behavior. Whether I had made a complaint or not, I was experiencing the same consequences from Officer Schneider.

Unfortunately, my supervision has allowed Officer Schneider to continue to dictate when he chooses to interact with me. In almost three years, I can only recall approximately three times Officer Schneider and I have ridden in the same police car together (and these were not full shifts). Allowing Officer Schneider to continue his dismissive behavior has been hurtful to me and weakened the trust I have in my superiors to protect me.

I know Officer Schneider has a close friendship with our fellow squad member, Officer Jeff Pittman. They have worked together for several years on Gateway NRS. I feel he has been influenced by Officer Schneider, and Officer Pittman has also engaged in isolating me from being included in the squad as a whole. Officer Pittman has admitted to me previously that he does feel loyalty to Officer Schneider and he often feels caught in the middle of squad conflict. I feel Officer Pittman has silenced me from addressing

the squad about an officer safety issue citing I was being too emotional to address the group. This was done in front of my male peers. After multiple times of Officer Pittman telling me to not be angry in front of the squad, I addressed him in front of the group to stop saying that to me. I have never heard Officer Pittman tell a male colleague they are being too angry or emotional when discussing or bringing up an issue.

Many who have worked in NRS the last few years, including me, believe Officer Pittman is completely different to work with when Officer Schneider is not around or at work. He is friendlier and more of a team player. I believe this occurrence illustrates the negative influence Officer Schneider has on certain squad members. I feel a situation I might have with Officer Schneider is automatically a situation with Officer Schneider *and* Officer Pittman. This pairing often feels like an impenetrable 'boys club' where I have no hope of ever joining. This adds a significant amount of stress and frustration to the issues I have experienced.

I feel I have also been excluded and isolated from certain members of NRS because I am a more conservative, 'by-the-book' police officer. I feel I am very mindful of consent and search and seizure issues. I think things should be done the right way and believe we should hold ourselves to a certain standard. I feel some members of Gateway NRS subscribe to a more relaxed view of these issues, and I feel like lines have been blurred at times. I feel this has resulted in me being excluded since some squad members might feel I would not approve of or question some of their practices.

Additionally, Officer Schneider has accused me of spending too much time in the office doing my paperwork. As my timeline reports, some members of NRS including Officer Schneider, come to work 1.5 to 2 hours early for work. They begin their paper, and as a result, they are ready to hit the street shortly after briefing. However, since I start work on time, if I have paperwork to complete, I do it after briefing (if I did not have the opportunity to do it the night before). This created a perception that I was in the office even though some of my peers had a two hour head start. Despite the obvious rationale of why this appeared as though I was in the office more, Officer Schneider still used it as an arguing point why I was not an effective police officer.

This became such a source of stress for me that Officer Schneider was constantly monitoring when I came to work and when I hit the street every day, that I began staying late at work to finish my paperwork. I would NOT take compensation for this time. Under normal circumstances I would be allowed to complete my paperwork on duty, and as long as I was on task, this should not have been an issue. However, in order to hit the street quicker during a work day, I would have stayed late the night before to finish paperwork that I would have held over. I justified doing this that my family was already asleep at home, I was just "winding down" at work, and I would thank myself the next day that I could get to the street faster and avoid problems with Officer Schneider. I could not count the number of 'free hours' I worked, but the number would be significant since it was over two years and happened weekly (Lt. Cooper would be in his office and would attest to me being late in the office doing paperwork). There were also times I completed search warrants and other paperwork at home so I would have less to do when I would start a work shift.

This situation created problems in my marriage because my husband would get frustrated I was essentially working for free, my time was taken away from the family, and it was due to the endless issues I seemed to experience from Officer Schneider. I knew I should not have to do this, but I feel I had developed a complex about being in the office longer than what Officer Schneider deemed acceptable. I feel I have more difficulty focusing when he is around. I did not want to give Officer Schneider any more ammunition to treat me poorly, so I sacrificed my time to complete things behind the scenes.

Throughout my tenure in NRS, I have brought issues numerous times to my supervision. I was very clear that I did not want to make a formal complaint against Officer Schneider because I feared the negative impact it would have on my career. I did not want to be “that female” or be subjected to the ‘scarlet letter’ I believed I would carry for making a formal complaint. I knew of other female officers who had been involved in the complaint process, and they felt their careers suffered having participated in it. I knew there would be a ripple effect of people affected and the tension would not remain just between Officer Schneider and me. I feel this backlash would not be deserved, and I was uncertain if my career was at a point where it would recover from making a formal complaint.

Despite this, I still went to my supervisors and reported the behavior. Although I believed Officer Schneider was sexist and that affected his treatment of me, I did not use this word with my supervisors. I knew if certain words were said, the decision to make a complaint would be taken out of my hands and a formal complaint would be initiated regardless. I felt if this occurred, I would be further victimized and subjected to additional hatred from Officer Schneider and his supporters.

However, I still reported what occurred with the hopes my supervisors would hold Officer Schneider accountable and the behavior would stop. I believe Sgt. Shoop did speak to Officer Schneider on multiple occasions. However, I felt Sgt. Shoop was too lenient on Officer Schneider since the behavior did not stop. I feel Officer Schneider only further isolated himself from me and dismissed me after reporting this behavior to Sgt. Shoop. Officer Schneider continued doing things “his way” and seemingly was allowed to get away with it with Sgt. Shoop. Other officers reported they were frustrated with Officer Schneider’s behavior; however, the general consensus was the supervisor was allowing it to continue. I am unaware of the extent of documentation regarding meetings or issues Sgt. Shoop addressed with Officer Schneider. I had met with Sgt. Shoop numerous times to discuss issues on the squad to include specific issues with Officer Schneider.

Sgt. Shoop prescribed to the “praise in public, discipline in private” style of supervision. Given the things that had happened on the squad, there were times Sgt. Shoop should have taken a stern approach in front of the group about behaviors that were occurring. By handling everything in private made me feel Sgt. Shoop was not willing to stand up for “the squad” as a whole publically. I believe some of these issues could have been addressed broadly as a group without being unprofessional to Officer Schneider (ex: Firearms Qualification). Sgt. Shoop mentioned to me he was trying to “shepherd” Officer Schneider’s heart to encourage him to change his attitude. However, I told Sgt. Shoop on more than one occasion that while he was trying to gently work with Officer Schneider, the entire rest of the squad was suffering and our morale was at an all-time low. In my opinion, a person like Officer Schneider is not persuaded to change by gentle prodding.

Ultimately, Sgt. Shoop apologized to the squad in individual meetings that he did not handle the conflict on the squad effectively. Although he said he had been well-intended, the result was not what was desired. I was appreciative Sgt. Shoop at least acknowledged this had occurred. I was hopeful we would move in a more effective direction. However, Sgt. Shoop ultimately tested for Lieutenant, unbeknownst to some of us on the squad, and eventually was promoted. Although I was supportive of Sgt. Shoop’s accomplishment, I could not help but think Sgt. Shoop was promoting because he wanted away from the mess that NRS had become. I was disappointed because I felt Sgt. Shoop at least knew about the details of my situation with Officer Schneider, and now this issue would be put in the hands of someone who did not know the severity of what had occurred.

Ultimately, Sgt. LaBrant was assigned as the new Gateway NRS sergeant. Although I had never had any issues with Sgt. LaBrant in my career, I was concerned how he would handle my situation with Officer Schneider. I believed Sgt. LaBrant and Officer Schneider were friends and knew they had worked in NRS for several years together.

As issues in my submitted timeline show, Sgt. LaBrant did not appear to take my issue with Officer Schneider seriously. I felt as though Sgt. LaBrant thought it was a non-issue, and he did not see the importance of monitoring it. This was disappointing because my time on Gateway NRS had been the worst of my career, and that was due to my volatile relationship with Officer Schneider.

Sgt. LaBrant appeared to support Officer Schneider blindly without knowing the specifics about what had transpired between Officer Schneider and me. Lt. Montgomery assured me Sgt. LaBrant had been provided the details about what had transpired previously. However, he also told me he had told Commander Brandt the same thing. However, in a later meeting, Commander Brandt told me Lt. Montgomery had told him I merely had a 'personality conflict' with Officer Schneider. I am unaware of exactly what Sgt. LaBrant was told initially. However, based on his lack of interest or concern, I am doubtful he was provided the extent of the events.

I had a telephone conversation with Lt. Montgomery regarding some of the issues the squad was having with Sgt. LaBrant. I felt Lt. Montgomery refused to entertain any issues we were having with Sgt. LaBrant. He asked me if I was still having issues with Officer Schneider, and I said I had had very little contact with Officer Schneider. I said Sgt. LaBrant and Officer Schneider were very like-minded, and Officer Schneider was able to let Sgt. LaBrant fight his fights now. Lt. Montgomery took this as my issue with Officer Schneider not being active any longer, and he expressed full confidence in Sgt. LaBrant's ability to supervise NRS.

I brought up to Lt. Montgomery that he had failed to facilitate the mediation with Officer Schneider he had promised when Sgt. LaBrant came to the squad. Initially, Lt. Montgomery seemed to forget he had had a meeting with me where we discussed this. He then provided several reasons why the mediation was delayed FOR MONTHS (Shaun Hardesty's death, vacations). Lt. Montgomery ultimately got frustrated with me in the conversation saying I had "blocked channels" for them to deal with Officer Schneider appropriately. This was infuriating to hear because I feel he was blaming me for the supervisors failing to hold Officer Schneider accountable. I felt if 'only I had made a complaint' then their job would have been made easier. I did not appreciate what I perceived to be victim-blaming. Lt. Montgomery ultimately told me no other Lieutenant would have stayed on the phone for 45 minutes speaking to me that long. This further made me feel like my concerns were falling on deaf ears and my supervisors could care less what I was experiencing. Lt. Montgomery would later apologize several months later for saying this to me.

I believe Sgt. LaBrant came to NRS with several preconceived notions about certain people on the squad. I felt he misjudged Officer Lewis and ultimately behaved maliciously towards him. Observing certain things first hand, I brought these concerns to both Sgt. LaBrant and Lt. Montgomery. These concerns seemed to fall on deaf ears and led to some significant issues that I detailed in my timeline.

I feel Sgt. LaBrant has behaved maliciously towards me as well in things he has said or his actions. This is the first time in my entire working career that I feel my supervisor does not appear to want me to succeed. I feel he has intentionally made decisions to limit my success and prevent the progression of my career. There are several people on Gateway NRS who desire to promote to sergeant in the future. All of these officers, including myself, have made this goal known to Sgt. LaBrant. I feel he will provide leadership opportunities to my male colleagues, but he does not extend the same opportunities to me. For instance, he will allow Officer Pittman to be an acting-supervisor in the event he is gone. He has also assigned Officer Pittman supervisor responsibilities to "give him experience" (managing knock and talk assignments, speaking to Chiefs about squad). Sgt. LaBrant carools with Officer Lindsey and has told him he wants Officer Lindsey to run a crime scene if they come across an applicable situation. He has not extended these opportunities to me, the only female on his squad.

However, I feel when I try to step up in leadership situations, Sgt. LaBrant dismisses my attempts. He has told me in front of my male peers that I “overthink everything” despite my expertise in the area. I have requested to work operations that would put me in a leadership role to direct my squad as the case agent. However, Sgt. LaBrant has denied several of these requests and been demeaning to me publically when I try to lead the squad. He has also cut me off while I was briefing other officers in my investigation.

I feel Sgt. LaBrant has passed me over for training because I am a female. Despite me having seniority, he completely disregarded my eligibility for the training class. I believed he assumed ‘the female’ on his squad would not have wanted that type of training. Sgt. LaBrant has made several jokes about my driving saying things like, “I can’t believe he’s LETTING you drive” (referring to my male partner ‘letting’ me drive that day). The few times I have ridden with Sgt. LaBrant, he almost always chooses to drive and insinuates I am a bad driver because I am a female (even though there is no proof my driving is inferior to his). However, when Sgt. LaBrant rides with my male peers, he is frequently the passenger and allows them to drive.

There was an instance where we were doing a search warrant at a residence. I went to lift up the couch to look under it. Sgt. LaBrant told me to get “one of the guys” to do that despite my ability to lift the couch on my own. I had to tell him I was perfectly capable of doing it myself.

Sgt. LaBrant feels comfortable having me operate in NRS functions suitable for females. He encourages me to do the community relations part of our job, but makes me feel like I am not capable of doing ‘real police work’. This has caused my confidence to be affected.

I have brought several issues to Sgt. LaBrant concerning Officer Schneider. I am unaware if Sgt. LaBrant ever documented these instances. However, I am doubtful since Sgt. LaBrant appears to protect and favor Officer Schneider. I feel Sgt. LaBrant will be particularly harsh in his supervisor comments and review of Officer Roy Lewis, and I am curious how those comments compare to Officer Schneider’s supervisor comments. There have been multiple situations where Sgt. LaBrant has agreed Officer Schneider should not have done certain things. However, I was never made aware if Sgt. LaBrant ever actually addressed Officer Schneider about the situations occurring.

I feel Sgt. LaBrant gave lower Annual Employee Review ratings to certain people on NRS based more on personality differences than actual work performance (Victim /Lewis/Bustoz). I am curious what the other members of NRS to include gang officer Bill Johnston received on their 2016-17 annual reviews. I asked Sgt. LaBrant, and he would not provide me with those answers. I feel Sgt. LaBrant has maliciously made decisions to punish those of us who have opposed him in his eyes.

Sgt. LaBrant has put me down publically in front of my male peers on numerous occasions. I feel he has modeled inappropriate behavior to his male subordinates on how to treat female officers. I have confronted Sgt. LaBrant about this before. He said he admitted to doing it when he should not have.

I also feel Sgt. LaBrant holds me to a different standard than my male co-workers. I feel he does not put me in the same ‘police officer category’ that he does with my male peers. This is disappointing because I would like to be viewed and treated like an equal to the males in this profession. I certainly believe I am capable of doing the same job and performing at a high level.

In the mediations I have been a part of that included Officer Schneider and/or Sgt. LaBrant, I have requested or had to demand they occur. This seems problematic that the supervisors were not advocating for mediation and facilitating it early on in this problem. I have been made to feel like I am beating a dead horse for wanting to address the issue and how to move forward. I feel unsupported in this situation when I am having to make the mediations happen and my supervisors are in no hurry to nip the issue in the bud.

As this situation has evolved, I feel the involved supervisors have minimized a serious situation and blamed me for perpetuating the issue. Sgt. LaBrant seems to have changed the narrative from being caused by Officer Schneider to it being caused by me and Officer Lewis. I feel I have been discouraged from making a complaint and told negative things I have brought to light will “follow” me in my career.

I did observe a noticeable difference in how Sgt. LaBrant and a couple officers on my squad treated me after I had met with the Union regarding this situation. It is unfortunate I am only treated more like an equal AFTER they heard I had to go to the Union. It is apparent those I work with have been advised to be more mindful of their interaction with me. Some people seem to completely avoid me which is a consequence that is unfortunate and undeserved.

All I ever wanted was to be treated with respect and be able to reach my potential in my work assignment. The hostile work environment I have been subjected to has affected me negatively mentally, physically, and emotionally. I have been robbed of happiness, time with my family, and felt a significant decline in my confidence. I have questioned my desire to promote to sergeant and felt guilt knowing I let certain people make me feel this way. This situation was undeserved, and I feel my hand is being forced to make a formal complaint. I feel the failure of my supervisors to address this issue and protect me have subjected me and other officers to unnecessary stress and anxiety. I find myself distracted at work which is certainly problematic given the profession I am in. I have had to devote countless weeks preparing my documentation for this meeting today, and I am angered how much of my life I had to spend to address this issue that I can never get back. I feel my career will be forever changed from this point forward, and I will certainly be subjected to undeserved backlash for having come forward. These are all things I wished to have avoided all the times I tried using my chain of command to address the problem.

I am hopeful this statement is regarded as the truth and seen as an accurate depiction of my experience on Gateway NRS.

Respectfully,

Officer Victim Victim

Personnel when I first arrived to NRS:

Sgt. Shoop

Victim

Davidge

Schneider

Pittman

R. Thomas

R. Carlo (replaced by Lewis)

Bustoz

B. Johnston

Sgt. Labrant

Davidge (left and replaced by M. Lindsey)

Lewis

Schneider

Pittman

Victim

Command: Briggs/Brandt/Blanco, Susuras/Montgomery, Shoop/LaBrant