



CAPRI CHIEF TRYING TO CLEAR NAME AFTER BEING FIRED

Emilio Rodriguez has been waiting quite some time to clear his name and set the record straight. Rodriguez is the former Isles of Capri fire-rescue chief who attended a name clearing hearing held by the Collier County Department of Human Resources on January 13. The county manager terminated Rodriguez back on November 4, which has upset residents of Capri's fire district. The residents were upset with the process to dismiss Rodriguez as the chief. They called it unfounded and a violation of the Florida Fire Fighters Bill of Rights. The director of the county's Emergency Management Services, Dan Summers, is the immediate supervisor of Rodriguez. Summers explained in a letter dated July 23, 2010 to Rodriguez that his termination was based on poor performance, which had been discussed at a public meeting. The county paid Dennis Nolen, an outside investigator, to check the allegations listed in the letter sent by Summers. On September 6, 2010, Nolen submitted a memorandum that found the allegations unsubstantiated and said the letter should be removed from Rodriguez's personnel file. One witness says that the letter was removed but then returned to his file upon his termination. "We are here for the purpose of a name-clearing hearing for a dismissed employee to rebut stigmatizing information that could cause embarrassment and hinder future employment," said Samuel Gold, Rodriguez's attorney. "This is not a reinstatement hearing, but a chance for him to clear his good name." These hearings are public but residents are not permitted to speak at them. As a result, multiple residents sent letters on Rodriguez's behalf to Gold. These letters spoke to the leadership skills of Rodriguez and his passion for his job and his involvement in the community. The chairman of the Isles of Capri Fire Advisory Board, the president of the Isles of Capri Community Inc. association, the pastor of Isles of Capri Christian Church and multiple residents who knew the fire chief sent in letters to Gold on Rodriguez's behalf. All of the letters were entered as exhibits during the hearing to the hearing officer. Copies were also given to the county's attorney, Colleen Greene, and Amy Lyberg, the human resources director. Audio tapes from public meetings were also submitted by Gold. The language used in Rodriguez's termination packet includes words such as 'toxic,' 'divisive,' and 'hostile.' "The charges against me are false," said Rodriguez. "My rights under the Fire Fighters Bill of Rights have been violated." Rodriguez also noted that he had 15 consecutive years of positive evaluations in his personnel record and that Summers did not evaluate him for his 16th year of service. He also said that Summers did not correct his evaluation for 2010 as he had promised after the allegations from the letter of concern were cleared. "He was terminated illegally," said Gold. The hearing officer has 30 days to make a decision based on the evidence provided and then submit the report.

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