

Written by Kathy

Monday, 06 February 2023 22:06

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[Clevelandurbannews.com](https://clevelandurbannews.com) and [Kathywraycolemanonlinenewsblog.com](https://kathywraycolemanonlinenewsblog.com) **By Kathy Wray Coleman, associate publisher, editor-in-chief, and a political and investigative reporter who trained for 17 years as a reporter with the Call and Post Newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio-Investigative article**

CLEVELAND, Ohio-Cuyahoga County interim sheriff Steven Hammett (pictured), the county's second Black sheriff and on the job hardly eight months after last year replacing interim sheriff Christopher Paul Viland, has abruptly resigned as new Cuyahoga County Executive Chris Ronayne, elected last November to the office, begins crafting his administrative team. The second largest of Ohio's 88 counties, the heavily Democratic county includes Cleveland and is roughly 29 percent Black

Sworn in as interim sheriff in May of last year by then County Executive Armond Budish, who did not seek reelection to his post last year, Hammett submitted his resignation letter on Monday. He first joined the sheriff's department in 2021, serving as captain. He was the county's sixth sheriff in 10 years.

Both Budish and Ronayne are Democrats.

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Community activists had called for a new sheriff in place of Hammett, citing his alleged harassment of Black women and Black homeowners for JPMorgan Chase Bank when he was police chief in University Hts, a middle to upper middle class Cleveland suburb that is largely White and heavily Jewish. Also at issue is a county jail that remains in disarray since more than a dozen inmate deaths in the past five years and a 2018 U.S. Marshals report that found the conditions in the jail and the treatment of inmates inhumane and unconstitutional.

When he was police chief in University Hts, research reveals that Hammett used White cops to stalk single Black women homeowners and to break into the homes of homeowners going through illegal foreclosure proceedings with JPMorgan Chase Bank and other unethical lenders. And he would help police steal their personal property for JPMorgan Chase Bank, including high-priced cars from their garages. An investigation also reveals that those who complained or fought back in court were often maliciously prosecuted locally and erroneously indicted with the help of the county prosecutor's office, dirty cops, and corrupt judges.

"We are pleased that interim sheriff Hammett has resigned and we look forward to a replacement that will serve the best interest of the county and the Black community and other marginalized groups," said activist Alfred Porter Jr. of the Cleveland-based grassroots group Black on Black Crime Inc. "Many victims under his tenure should be breathing a sigh of relief since he is gone as sheriff."

Per the charter, the county sheriff is appointed rather than elected, and in cooperation with the county executive and the county council, a bipartisan, largely Democratic council that consists of 11 elected members. Former sheriff Cliff Pinkney was the county's first Black sheriff. He resigned in May of 2019, also amid controversy.

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“Captain Hammett is a long-time law enforcement professional with a proven track record of leadership in our community,” Budish said in a statement emailed before he swore in Hammett as sheriff in May of last year. “I am confident in his ability to lead the sheriff’s department as our law enforcement staff continue to protect and serve the residents of Cuyahoga County.”

Hammett joined the sheriff’s department in September of 2021, four years after he was police chief under then University Heights Mayor Susan Infeld, who lost reelection in 2017 amid allegations of public corruption and assisted theft of residents homes for JPMorgan Chase Bank via illegal foreclosures. She lost in an upset election to current University Hts Mayor Michael Dylan, a Democrat like Infeld who brought in his own police chief when he assumed office. When Infeld lost as mayor Hammett was ousted along with her. He is a Solon resident and has over 35 years of law enforcement experience. He began his career as a Cleveland Hts patrolman and has also served as a deputy chief for Shaker Heights.

The damning report released in November of 2018 by U.S. Marshals on county jail conditions generated local and national news, a dreadful look at how inmates are mistreated such as withholding food for punishment, jailing juveniles with adults, rat and roach infested jail facilities, and a paramilitary jail corrections officers unit dubbed "The Men in Black" who intimidate and harass inmates. The report also found profound mistreatment of female inmates, and that pregnant women were being jailed on floor mats and denied adequate healthcare.

Several lawsuits remain pending regarding the county's now infamous jail, which has been led by Warden Michelle Henry since 2020. Former county executive Budish ' decision not to run for reelection last year follows what began as a raid of his offices in downtown Cleveland after the series of jail deaths that peaked in 2018. Another FBI raid would follow, and so would indictments, though not of Budish, 69 and a lawyer. There have in fact been indictments and

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convictions of at least nine jail guards, the former jail director, and former jail warden Eric Ivey, who is Black.

Ivey took a misdemeanor plea deal with no jail time before Common Pleas Judge Nancy Fuerst with an agreement that he act as a snitch.

Hired in 2015 after Budish took office for a first term, former sheriff Pinkney was succeeded by Gregory Croucher , who resigned in April of 2021 amid controversy, and Croucher, who is White, was succeeded by Viland, also White. Viland hardly lasted a year when Budish, last May, ousted him from his sheriff duties for the since removed Hammett.

The FBI and other outside authorities have been visiting the jail on a routine basis since late in 2018 when inmates began popping up dead in mass. The Cleveland jail merged with the county jail per a regionalism plan adopted by county and city officials in 2017, which created nothing but more problems. Activists say the jail remains a problem They are also concerned with an array of other issues, including excessive bail and sentences, malicious prosecutions, grand jury tampering, indictment fixing, and the denial of indigent counsel and speedy trial rights to indigent Black defendants. Data also show that White inmates are getting favorable treatment and that Black inmates are more harshly disciplined.

Cleveland community activists picketed in front of the Cuyahoga County Justice Center in 2018 over judicial and prosecutorial malfeasance, police misconduct, and the overcrowding of the

## Cuyahoga County's crooked sheriff Steven Hammett resigns as Cleveland activists applaud the move and

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county jail, a continuation of activist rallies that began in 2016. Hastened by the coronavirus outbreak, activists had been picketing regularly at the Justice Center in downtown Cleveland over jail conditions, in front of Budish' gated home in affluent Beachwood, where they called for his resignation, and at county administrative headquarters before county council meetings.

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We interviewed former president Barack Obama one-on-one when he was campaigning for president. As to the Obama interview,

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