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Minneapolis Police Chief responds to questions over hiring of ex-Virginia officer acquitted of assault

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Footage shows Tyler Timberlake kneeling on a man's neck in June 2020. Timberlake is no longer part of MPD.

Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara says he was present for the interview of a former police officer who was accused of excessive force against an unarmed Black man and was later hired by Minneapolis police.

Timberlake was previously charged but acquitted of assault while working for a department in Fairfax County, Virginia. That incident happened just days after former Minneapolis officer Derek Chauvin murdered George Floyd.

The city of Minneapolis confirmed Thursday that Tyler Timberlake's last day at the Minneapolis Police Department was Wednesday. He joined MPD on Jan. 9.

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Minneapolis Police Chief O'Hara released the following statement Sunday afternoon:

"I understand from talking with the City Attorney that my ability to discuss personnel matters publicly is very limited under Minnesota law. But this is what I can say: The MPD hiring process involves a background investigation and also screening by a hiring roundtable. Candidates who advance past those steps of the process are eligible for an interview as the last step of the process. On my second day of employment with the MPD, I observed Mr. Timberlake's interview. He was hired thereafter.

I did not know of the existence of video capturing a use of force incident involving this individual until after receiving a media inquiry. Upon learning of the existence of video and seeing it myself, I immediately ordered an investigation into MPD's hiring processes.

I was hired to become the MPD chief in order to reform the department and restore faith and pride in the MPD patch. To imply that I had known about this video at the time of hire and later lied is false."

— Minneapolis Police Chief Brian O'Hara

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On Friday, the Minneapolis Police Federation issued this statement related to Timberlake's departure.

"It is truly unfortunate Chief O'Hara released Officer Tyler Timberlake from employment from the police department. Chief O'Hara was in the final interview of Timberlake and was fully aware of his history. During his final interview, he was assured by Chief O'Hara he would be okay, if he did good work. This is clearly not the case.

The hiring of Timberlake was not an issue until an April 19th news article created a politically charged narrative of his hiring, which, grew in intensity, when Chief O'Hara stated "I am extremely concerned about what I have just learned pertaining to the hiring of this individual who is currently in agency training and yet to be deployed into service".

By all MN POST standards, nothing precludes Timberlake from being a peace officer in the state of Minnesota. He was acquitted on all charges in Virginia and remained employed for nearly three years after the incident. Releasing an officer with nearly 1,800 hours of training, years of prior experience and is qualified to work in the state of Minnesota, seems counterproductive as the police department continues to struggle to meet staffing needs and has approximately 42% less sworn officers, than what it had 3 years ago."

— Minneapolis Police Federation

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