



February 6, 2015

Mayor Jeri Muoio
West Palm Beach City Hall
Post Office Box 3366
West Palm Beach, Florida 33402
via e-mail to: jmuoio@wpb.org

Re: LGBT matters

Dear Jeri:

Yesterday's meeting with West Palm Beach Police Chief Bryan Kummerlen and Assistant Chief Mooney Sarah went extremely well. Chief Kummerlen advised us that he will be appointing an officer from the Department to serve as liaison to the city's LGBT community in the next few weeks.

The Chief's new liaison will not only assist the Police Department's efforts to improve service delivery to the city's LGBT residents, but also will work to increase awareness and training on LGBT issues within the Department. I trust that the officer will work closely with Robert Telford so that there is no need to re-invent the wheel. (By the way, Robert is great to work with. PBCHRC has received very positive feedback since you appointed him to serve as your liaison to the city's LGBT community.)

When we left yesterday's meeting, I mentioned to Robert that thanks to your leadership, West Palm Beach may be the only city in Florida to have two municipal LGBT liaisons!

Working with you over the years has truly been a pleasure and behalf of PBCHRC's Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your effectiveness in keeping our city in the forefront of LGBT rights.

Before you joined the West Palm Beach City Commission, your predecessors had already taken steps to towards achieving equality for municipal employees and city residents. The West Palm Beach Equal Opportunity Ordinance prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation in employment, housing and public accommodations. City employees with domestic partners were entitled to the same insurance as married municipal employees, and the city had extended lifetime health insurance benefits to the surviving domestic partner of any city employee killed in the line of duty.

Lesbian and gay couples were given the opportunity to register their domestic partnerships at City Hall and were entitled to a number of benefits previously reserved for married couples.

P.O. Box 267
WEST PALM BEACH
Florida 33402
561.586.0203

pbchrc@aol.com
www.pbchrc.org

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While most public officials across the nation would have been very comfortable with these remarkable strides towards LGBT equality, it soon became clear to us that you were not “most public officials.”

When you first took office, PBCHRC advised you that while the spouses of municipal employees were entitled to purchase city health insurance coverage in the event an employee lost a job (or died), domestic partners of City employees were not entitled to the same continuation coverage.

In 2006, PBCHRC asked one of your colleagues on the City Commission to look into this inequity. Although she told us she would, she never followed up with it. Only when you took ownership of this pro-family issue, did anything get done. Working with staff, you found a way to have the city provide identical continuation coverage for the families of all employees and you convinced the city Commission to do so.

The following year, you were instrumental in getting the City Commission to amend the Equal Opportunity Ordinance to prohibit discrimination based on gender identity and expression. As a result of your leadership, numerous public employers through Palm Beach County have followed suit.

When PBCHRC brought to your attention that the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) were being used to deny city employees with domestic partners the same family leave benefits that were granted to sex married couples, you once again took up the pro-family cause. Working with the city Attorney, you proposed a solution. And at your first official meeting as Mayor in 2011, your proposal was adopted unanimously by the city commission.

It is clear, that every time you learned that gay and lesbian employees were being slighted by the federal government, you found a way to address the problem. When you learned that employees who insured their domestic partners on the city's health plans were subjected to a federal tax that did not apply married couples, you increased the salaries of those employees to fully reimburse them for those additional federal taxes. You explained your decision to reporters by stating, “Put simply, it comes down to a matter of equal pay for equal work.”

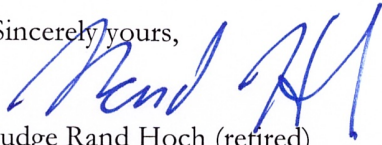
Contractors doing business with the city are now required to treat the families of all of their employees equally because last year, you succeeded in having the City Commission enact an Equal Benefits Ordinance requiring city contractors to provide the same family benefits to employees with domestic partners and same-sex spouses as they provided to employees whose marriages are recognized by the state of Florida.

For a long time, you have realized that the only way to achieve full equality for all families is for all couples to have the same ability to get married. You were one of the first mayors in the nation to join Mayors for the Freedom to Marry and you have been an outspoken leader on marriage equality. When lawsuits were filed to achieve marriage equality, you insisted that the city participate. West Palm Beach joined the Cities of Miami Beach and Orlando in the amicus briefs filed in the federal lawsuit which finally brought marriage equality to the Sunshine State. And on the first day that same sex couples were permitted to marry here in Florida, you personally officiated at the wedding of a gay couple at City Hall.

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Our city and our LGBT community are stronger because of your efforts and passion – and I want to thank you (again) for all that you do.

Sincerely yours,



Judge Rand Hoch (retired)
President and Founder

RH:r

copies via e-mail to: Board of Directors, PBCHRC
Robert Telford, Mayor Muoio's LGBT liaison