



PRESS RELEASE

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DC Fire and EMS Concludes Investigation of Recruit Class 387 Photo

(Washington, DC) – The DC Fire and EMS Department has concluded our investigation of a picture taken at our Training Academy in April 2019 of members of Recruit Class 387.

The picture, which surfaced last month, caused great concern within the Department and to many in the community due to the hand gestures that three of members were making in the photograph.

The hand sign that was displayed in the photograph has been associated with white supremacist hate groups. However, after a thorough investigation, which included several interviews, we have determined that those who were making the same hand gesture were playing a game and had no racist intentions.

The investigation found that *“the evidence fully supports that [the three members] never intended for their hand gesture to stand for any negative sign”* and they were *“credible in stating that they did not understand that such hand gesture could also mean a sign of white supremacy”* at the time that they used it.

All 22 recruits pictured in the photograph were interviewed individually, and they all stated that they believe there was no racial or hateful intent by the three recruits who made the hand sign.

An African American recruit in Class 387, in their interview, stated, *“Given what I learned about them, I don’t think they would ever intend for that hand gesture to mean anything racist. They are the kind of guys that would help anyone. They had a spirit of helping and encouraging others, irrespective of whether you are Black or White.”*

In the interviews with those that displayed the hand sign, *“they were all sincere in regretting that they had hurt anyone or that anyone was offended by their hand gesture. They were apologetic for all the hurt caused.”*

The Final Investigative Report into this matter concludes, “The evidence supports that *[the three members] exhibited great team spirit during the class, and there was substantial evidence to support that, with no evidence to support anything differently. I find no Equal Employment Opportunity violations.*”

Fire and EMS Chief Gregory M. Dean, as well as the staff and members of the DC Fire and EMS Department remain committed to ensuring that we have a diverse workforce. With this comes a responsibility to ensure that any person of any background is treated with compassion and integrity. This reflects on not just how we treat each other but how we serve and assist the residents and guests of the District of Columbia, and how they perceive us.

Chief Dean has instructed the leadership team, including those at the Training Academy, that games of any kind will not be condoned or tolerated during the workday.

The Department will continue, as we have for the last several years, to provide equal employment opportunity and diversity training, including training on sexual orientation, and preventing sexual harassment, for every recruit class that enters the Department, and as part of our curriculum for supervisors and managers, as well.

This is an ongoing effort and conversation within our organization, and we welcome the community’s support and input as we move forward.

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