



**BROWARD COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
INTERNAL AFFAIRS
INVESTIGATIVE REPORT**

IA CASE #: IA2022-0003

SUBMISSION DATE: June 14th, 2022

INVESTIGATION INITIATION DATE: January 11, 2022

PERIOD TOLLED: N/A

180th DAY: July 10, 2022

INVESTIGATOR: Sergeant Christopher Sutter, CCN 14701

COMPLAINANT: Joseph Napoli

SUBJECT EMPLOYEE: Fire Chief James Bishop, CCN 13394

SHERIFF'S POLICY:

1. SPM 2.3 Conduct Unbecoming an Employee
2. SPM 2.5.2 Truthfulness

COMMAND: Department of Fire Rescue and Emergency Services
Aircraft Rescue reassigned from Cooper City

DATE OF HIRE: April 6, 1987

RANK: District Chief

DATE OF MOST RECENT PROMOTION: February 13, 2021

PROBATION STATUS: N/A

SUBMITTED TO S.A.O.: N/A

BARGAINING UNIT: International Association of Firefighters

INTRODUCTION:

On January 5, 2022, the Cooper City Manager Joseph Napoli, authored an email to the Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) Director of Fire Rescue Gregory Holness, CCN 12696, in which he stated that the city was not satisfied with the performance of District Chief James Bishop, CCN 13394. Napoli advised that events surrounding the handling of the Holiday Santa Program had caused concerns of Chief Bishop's integrity and trustworthiness and had led to unstable relationships with some city officials. On January 10, 2022, Napoli authored a letter to Broward County Sheriff Gregory Tony, requesting the removal of Bishop as Cooper City's District Fire Chief.

ALLEGATIONS:

1. It is alleged that Chief James Bishop's conduct with Cooper City officials surrounding the notifications of the Holiday Santa Program, had discredited himself and the agency, in violation of **SPM 2.3 - Conduct Unbecoming an Employee.**
2. It is alleged that Chief James Bishop made false or inaccurate verbal or written communication to Cooper City officials regarding the Holiday Santa Program, in violation of **SPM 2.5.2 - Truthfulness.**

THE FOLLOWING SHERIFF'S POLICIES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WITH RESPECT TO THE ALLEGATIONS:

1. SPM 2.3 Conduct Unbecoming an Employee:

Since conduct of employees on or off duty may reflect directly on BSO, they should conduct themselves at all times in a manner which does not discredit themselves, BSO, or the County.

2. SPM 2.5.2 Truthfulness:

Employees shall be forthright and candid and will not knowingly make any false or inaccurate verbal or written communication by act or omission in any official matter.

INVESTIGATION:

On January 14, 2022, this case was assigned to me by Internal Affairs Executive Lieutenant Johanna Palacio, CCN 11176. I was then provided with the following documents:

- Complaint Control Form – IA2022-0003
- Citizen Contact (CC2022-0012)
- Employee Notification Memo – Chief James Bishop
- Email thread from Joseph Napoli to Chief Gregory Holness
- Email from Joseph Napoli to Chief Gregory Holness (01-05-2022)
- Letter from Joseph Napoli to Sheriff Gregory Tony

I reviewed the email thread which consisted of conversations between Broward Sheriff's Office (BSO) Fire Chief Executive Director Gregory Holness, CCN 12696, and Cooper City Manager, Joseph Napoli, from December 23, 2021, and January 6, 2022. I also reviewed the letter sent by Joseph Napoli to Sheriff Gregory Tony on January 10, 2022. The following is a synopsis of those emails and the letter [In-Part]:

On December 23, 2021, City Manager Joseph Napoli emailed Chief Gregory Holness, and advised of Cooper City's dissatisfaction with the performance of Chief James Bishop. Napoli requested a meeting to discuss possible remedies and a meeting was scheduled between Holness and Napoli on December 30, 2021, at Napoli's office, with another meeting scheduled to be held on January 6, 2022. Prior to that meeting, Holness advised that he had spoken with the Undersheriff Nicole Anderson, CCN 8182, and he requested a letter from Napoli, citing all the areas of concern regarding Chief Bishop's performance. On January 5, 2022, Napoli responded with the following:

Chief,

As I sent you earlier and we have previously discussed, I am informing you of the City's dissatisfaction with the performance of Chief Bishop. Events surrounding how he handled the annual Holiday Santa Program have caused concerns about his integrity and trustworthiness and have led to unsustainable relationships with some City officials. Chief Bishop's selection of key participants in the program which were not consistent with past procedures, and his subsequent responses that did not correlate with what actually occurred when confronted by a City official, have caused Chief Bishop's integrity and trustworthiness to be called into question and has resulted in an unsustainable relationship among some City officials. As such, I would like to come to an immediate resolution of this situation. As we discussed last week, I would like to meet tomorrow to come to a resolution.

*Sincerely,
Joe*

On January 6, 2022, Chief Holness responded that BSO still needed a formalized letter outlining the allegations of "integrity", "trustworthiness", and an "unsustainable relationship" among some city officials. Due to the seriousness of the allegations, Undersheriff Anderson would be attending the meeting, which had been rescheduled for an undetermined date. On the final email by City Manager Napoli on January 6, 2022, he advised that he was displeased that the meeting for that day, had to be rescheduled to allow Undersheriff Anderson to attend. Napoli indicated that the Cooper City contract with BSO, instructs them to provide notification to BSO in the event the city becomes dissatisfied with the District Chief.

On January 10, 2022, Cooper City Manager Napoli authored a letter to BSO Sheriff Gregory Tony, which stated the following:

Dear Sheriff Tony:

In accordance with Section 10(c) of the agreement between the City and the Broward Sheriff's Office for Emergency Medical, Fire Protection, and Fire Prevention Services, dated October 1, 2020 (the "Agreement"); and as a follow up to my emails to Chief Gregory Holness, dated December 23, 2021 and January 5, 2022, this correspondence shall serve as a formal request for BSO to remove the City's current Fire Chief.

Pursuant to the Agreement, I have the sole discretion to request a change of the District Chief, with or without cause, and I am hereby asking BSO to provide suitable candidates to fill this position as soon as possible. I would also like to discuss the transition process until a new District Chief is named. Please contact me at 954-435-4300 ext. 293.

Thank you for your anticipated and prompt response to this important matter.

*Sincerely,
Joseph Napoli*

(Refer to the email thread between Manager Napoli and Chief Holness, the email from Napoli to Holness (01-05-2022), and the letter from Napoli to Sheriff Tony for details)

[End of Synopsis]



Cooper City Officials

I accessed the Cooper City website (<https://www.coopercityfl.org>) and located a roster of the city officials which listed the cellphone numbers and email addresses of the following officials:

- Mayor – Greg Ross
- Commissioner District 1 - Massimo “Max” Pulcini
- Commissioner District 2 - Howard Meltzer
- Commissioner District 3 - Jeff Green
- Commissioner District 4 – Ryan C. Shrouder
- City Manager – Joseph Napoli

On January 11, 2022, I contacted the complainant, Mr. Joseph Napoli, who is the City Manager for Cooper City. Napoli verbally declined to provide a sworn statement at the time. On January 12, 2022, an email was also sent to Napoli’s official email requesting his assistance in this Internal Investigation. At the submission of this report, no response was received from Napoli. (Refer to the Memo to the File- Complainant – City Manager Joseph Napoli for details)

On January 12, 2022, I contacted the Mayor of Cooper City, Greg Ross, and attempted contact with Cooper City Commissioner Howard Meltzer. Ross verbally declined to provide a sworn statement at the time, and I left a message for Meltzer on his Cooper City office line. On the same date, I also emailed Ross and Meltzer at their respective official email addresses, requesting their assistance in this Internal Investigation. At the submission of this report, no response was received from Ross or Meltzer. (Refer to the Memos to the File for Mayor Greg Ross and Commissioner Howard Meltzer for details)

On January 12, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from Cooper City Commissioner Ryan Shrouder. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Cooper City Commissioner Ryan Shrouder was aware of the emails sent to BSO from the City Manager, Joseph Napoli, requesting the removal of Fire Chief James Bishop per the city’s contract, due to issues with city officials. Shrouder advised people were claiming the removal was due to an incident surrounding the Holiday Santa Program, which is administered through the fire department. Shrouder described the program, which involves residents of Cooper City signing up to have Santa Clause deliver presents to their houses via a fire truck. The program took place on December 18th and 19th, 2021, involving one or two people participating as Santa. Shrouder advised prior to the event Mayor Greg Ross had asked Chief Bishop who was going to be Santa, and what was told to the mayor was inaccurate on the day of the event. Upon learning that a former Cooper City Commissioner (James Curran) was participating as Santa, Mayor Ross thought Chief Bishop had lied to him. Shrouder had previously been informed in person by Bishop that a firefighter would be Santa for the event. Shrouder did not recall any emails which named who was participating as Santa.

Commissioner Shrouder was not present during any conversations between Chief Bishop and Mayor Ross concerning the Santa Clause Program. Shrouder spoke with City Manager Napoli, who advised Mayor Ross wanted Chief Bishop removed from Cooper City for lying to him. Chief Bishop had advised the firefighter who was scheduled to be Santa had called out sick or something had come up at the last minute. Mayor Ross believed the change in scheduling was pre-planned

and Bishop had lied. Ross was alleged to have a schedule that was created prior to the event, which listed James Curran as Santa Clause. Bishop had advised that the program was a BSO organized event and not a C.E.R.T organized event, to which Shrouder agreed with that statement. *C.E.R.T is a Civilian Emergency Response Team made up of volunteers and organized by FEMA to educate citizens about disaster preparedness and basic disaster response skills.* Shrouder told Napoli that he should speak with Bishop and investigate if it was a lie or a misunderstanding. If Bishop had lied about the program, Shrouder advised that would be an issue.

Commissioner Shrouder advised that he had not requested for Chief Bishop to be removed and was not one of the city officials referred to in the emails from City Manager Napoli to Chief Holness. Shrouder believed it was important for the commissioners to get along and be comfortable with the directors at the city level. Shrouder could not recall any prior incidents in which Napoli had mentioned concerns with Bishop, which would have led to distrust within the city. Shrouder continued that Mayor Ross and Bishop have had issues, which may be due to miscommunication. Shrouder mentioned the following, Bishop is in a difficult position as from a contractual standpoint, Cooper City does not agree with BSO's position on things. Ross gets upset at the commission meetings when the city's ladder truck is missing, and he is not getting the information he wants from Bishop, who has no control over the status of the truck. Shrouder advised the meetings have become contentious between Ross and Bishop, which may have led to some hostility from there. Shrouder later added that the decision to remove a fire chief should have been voted on by the city commission members, as it indicates in the city charter.

Commissioner Shrouder has not had any issues with Chief Bishop in regard to his trustworthiness, and advised he finds Bishop and his answers to questions to be truthful. If it is found that Bishop lied to the mayor, he would have to be moved because the relationship would not work. Shrouder described a commission meeting in which Mayor Ross believed Bishop was lying about a fire truck (Platform 28), which was out of service for repair. According to CAD (Computer Aided Dispatch) reports, Platform 28 had responded to calls during this time. Bishop informed Ross, although a fire engine had responded in its place, and its call sign was Platform 28, to which Shrouder understood, but Ross thought Bishop was lying. Shrouder considered it to be a miscommunication.

Commissioner Shrouder believed that if the person who was performing as Santa was vetted and passed a background check, they could participate as Santa. Shrouder was unaware if James Curran had performed as Santa in the past and was unaware of how the person was selected to perform as Santa. Shrouder did not consider the Holiday Santa Program to be an official city matter. Chief Bishop would not financially benefit from Curran performing as Santa, and Curran did not benefit in any way. Following the Santa event, Mayor Ross and Chief Bishop discussed the issue involving the change of the person performing as Santa at Fire Station 28. Shrouder believed the members of the C.E.R.T may have been present and stated C.E.R.T team member Andrew Gross had spoken at a recent commissioner meeting regarding the interaction.

Commissioner Shrouder feels that if Chief Bishop is found to have lied, then he would have to be removed because there is no longer any trust. If a mistake was made, then Shrouder would not want to punish anyone for a miscommunication. Shrouder advised if the manager did not conduct an investigation prior to making his determination to remove Bishop, then he would consider terminating the city manager. (Refer to Commissioner Ryan Shrouder's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On January 13, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from Cooper City Commissioner Massimo "Max" Pulcini. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Cooper City Commissioner Massimo Pulcini has been a commissioner for approximately three years. As a commissioner, Pulcini only is involved in the hiring and firing of employees when it comes to directors, such as the police captains and fire chiefs. The city manager oversees the hiring of all other employees for the city. Pulcini advised he has dealt with Fire Chief Bishop since he was hired as the chief of Cooper City. *Chief Bishop was promoted to a district chief on February 13, 2021, and assigned to Cooper City.*

Commissioner Pulcini described Chief Bishop's commission meetings as "*not too smooth,*" advising the way he would reply to Mayor Ross' questions was antagonistic. Pulcini advised that he did not have any issues with Bishop and did not know of any of the other commissioners having any issues with Bishop. Mayor Ross' main concern with Bishop during the commission meetings involved an apparatus (Fire Truck), and its condition. Pulcini described Bishop's handling of the interactions with Ross as dismissive and Pulcini did not agree with how Bishop handled himself. Pulcini continued that Cooper City needed a fire chief they could get along with, as they cannot continue to have an antagonistic relationship. Pulcini did not have any discussions with any of the other commissioners about Bishop's behavior, nor did he make any recommendations to remove Bishop from his position. Pulcini did believe that Chief Bishop needed to be replaced but did not believe he needed to be investigated.

Commissioner Pulcini was aware of the Holiday Santa Program, held by Cooper City's Fire Rescue, but advised that he was not involved in the organization of the event, nor did he have any communication with Chief Bishop prior to the event. After the event, Pulcini had learned of an incident between Mayor Ross and Bishop, where Ross was irate about James Curran performing as Santa Clause. Pulcini did not know if any city officials were involved in the planning of the event, advising it is not the city commission's responsibility. There was no discussions prior to the event, in regard to James Curran performing as Santa, and Pulcini advised the problem was that Curran was a resident and not a C.E.R.T member or a firefighter. Pulcini had not been informed of who was going to perform as Santa, prior to Curran. Pulcini was contacted by Curran following the event, who advised of a confrontation with Mayor Ross about Curran performing as Santa.

Commissioner Pulcini thought Chief Bishop's removal was a culmination between the commission meetings and the Santa event which pushed things to the limit. Pulcini did not believe the incident involving Santa was the basis for the removal, but believed it was due to the tensions between Mayor Ross and Bishop during the commission meetings. Pulcini advised the city was in the process of purchasing a two a half million-dollar fire truck, and they needed a fire chief they could work with to make the transaction go smoothly. During his conversations with City Manager Napoli, Pulcini did not recall any conversations about Bishop being untruthful. Pulcini did not believe Bishop or Curran benefited in any way from allowing Curran to perform as Santa. Pulcini advised Curran has been performing as Santa and the Easter Bunny for the past thirty years, because Curran just loves doing it.

Commissioner Pulcini believed the emails sent by City Manager Napoli were a mistake and sent in haste. Pulcini did not have any issues regarding Chief Bishop's integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. (Refer to Commissioner Massimo Pulcini's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On January 13, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from Cooper City Commissioner Jeff Green. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Cooper City Commissioner Jeff Green is serving in his twelfth year as a commissioner, and confirmed the commission is only involved in the hiring or firing of city employees at the director level. Green advised that he voted to approve the hiring of Fire Chief James Bishop and has never had any issues with Bishop's trustworthiness or truthfulness. Green described Bishop as "*a consummate professional.*" Green had no knowledge of any other commissioners or city officials who had expressed any concerns over Bishop's professionalism with his job.

Commissioner Green advised that Cooper City has two events surrounding the holidays, with one event run by the city, and the other by BSO. The Cooper City Manager, Joseph Napoli, organizes the event, "Light up Cooper City", while BSO organizes and runs the Holiday Santa program. Green was not aware of any officials for Cooper City being involved in the planning of the Holiday Santa program for past events, but he believed the fire chief would make the city manager aware of the event. Green had heard the C.E.R. T team was involved in the Holiday Santa program, but he did not know to what extent. The only information Green received prior to the BSO event, was being informed of the dates it would occur, and how to sign up for the event. Green had not been informed on who was to perform as Santa for the event. In the past, Green advised that James Curran has always participated as Santa for the "Light up Cooper City" and Holiday Santa events. Green explained that Curran participates in these programs because he loves this community, and in addition to the holiday events, Curran volunteers as a coach and for the city's Autism Awareness program. Green did not believe Chief Bishop or Curran gained any benefit from Curran performing as Santa during the event.

Prior to the event, Commissioner Green received a call from James Curran, who advised that he would be stepping in for the Holiday Santa event, as the person originally scheduled was no longer available. Green could not provide the date he received the call, but advised it was close to the event, and sounded as if Curran was stepping in at the last minute. Following the event, Curran contacted Green and advised Mayor Ross was upset that he was performing as Santa. Curran continued that Ross was at the fire station and would not let the truck pass, and Ross wanted to take a picture of Curran while dressed as Santa. Following the event, Ross berated Chief Bishop about Curran performing as Santa. Green did not observe any of these events, but they were relayed by Curran via telephone.

Commissioner Green then contacted Chief Bishop, who advised James Curran had stepped in to perform as Santa and Mayor Ross was not happy about it. Green advised the conversation he had with Curran was consistent with Bishop's account of the incident. Green informed of "*Bad Blood*" between Curran and Ross for the past years, along with Curran expressing interest in running for mayor in two years, which Green suspects that has a lot to do with the incident. Green did not know of any other city officials who had any issues with Curran performing as Santa for the event other than Ross. Green added that Ross and Curran just do not like each other.

Commissioner Green advised Chief Bishop was doing a phenomenal job, and following the incident, Green contacted Bishop to say that he appreciates his level of professionalism. Green also apologized to Bishop about being berated by Mayor Ross. Green was later contacted by Cooper City Manager, Joseph Napoli, who advised a request to remove Bishop was going to be

sent to BSO. Green told Napoli that he did not support that request, and felt the situation was ridiculous, about who was Santa Clause during a BSO sponsored event. Green then contacted Chief Gregory Holness to show his support for Bishop and apologize for the nonsense going on in Cooper City about who was Santa Clause. Holness informed Green that he had a conversation with Napoli and during the conversation, Ross picked up the phone and advised he wanted Bishop gone.

Commissioner Green confirmed that City Manager Napoli was not referencing him in the email Napoli sent to Chief Gregory Holness on January 5, 2022, citing, "*unsustainable relationships with some city officials.*" Green never had any concerns about the integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness of Chief Bishop. Green added that he has never had any issues with Bishop's performance or professionalism and wanted to stress that he was doing an upstanding job. (Refer to Commissioner Jeff Green's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

Witness Statements

On January 12, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from James Curran. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

James Curran is a resident and former City Commissioner (2008 to 2020) for the city of Cooper City. Curran began participating in Cooper City's Holiday Santa Program in 1998 and began participating as the Easter Bunny in 2004. Over the past twenty years, Curran estimated he performed as Santa about four to five times and has been on standby as a backup about ten times, and there has never been any issues or complaints about him. Approximately one week prior to the Light up Cooper City Event, which took place on December 3, 2021, Chief James Bishop contacted Curran to be a backup Santa for the yearly event, which was scheduled for December 18th and 19th, 2021. Two days prior to the event, Bishop contacted Curran and informed that the person who was scheduled to be Santa had a family issue, and Cooper City's Mayor Greg Ross was not interested in being Santa. Bishop then requested Curran to perform as Santa for the event, which Curran accepted. Curran has owned his own Santa Clause outfit for the past ten years. Curran did not know the name of the person who was supposed to perform as Santa for the event.

On Saturday, December 18, 2021, Chief Bishop advised James Curran that they would be picking him up for the event to keep the tension down, as Mayor Ross was hanging out at the Fire Station. Curran then began the event and upon arriving at the second stop, he was performing as Santa in front of a residence, when Ross pulled up and began yelling into his cellphone, "*I want him [Curran] out of this city, I want him out of my city, and I do not want him here anymore.*" Ross then turned around, entered his car, and left the scene. Curran continued with the event, and at the end of the evening they returned to Cooper City Fire Station 28.

Upon returning to the station Saturday night, James Curran told Chief Bishop that he will step down as Santa if Mayor Ross wants to perform. Bishop responded that Ross did not wish to be Santa, he just did not want Curran to be Santa, and Bishop did not have another backup scheduled. On the following day, Sunday December 19, 2021, Curran responded to the Fire Station for the second day of the event. Upon arrival, Curran observed Ross outside the station, who advised that he wanted to take pictures of Curran. Curran told Ross, "*Mayor you have been naughty this year. I am not taking pictures with you,*" and then closed the door to the fire truck. Curran was not

informed of any other city officials who did not want him to perform as Santa. Curran advised Mayor Ross and he were on good terms for many years, until the last election cycle, when Curran backed another candidate for commissioner, who was running against Ross' pick. Following the election in 2020, Ross had Curran removed from performing as Santa and the Easter Bunny. Curran also advised that he is running for mayor in the 2024 election, possibly against Commissioner Howard Meltzer, who is Mayor Ross' pick.

On January 11, 2022, James Curran spoke with Cooper City Commissioner Jeff Green, with Curran requesting to know if Chief James Bishop was being removed from Cooper City because he performed as Santa. Green did not know the answer at the time and advised that he would speak about it during the city commission meeting that night.

James Curran did not feel that either Chief James Bishop or he benefited in any way from Curran performing as Santa. As a former Cooper City Commissioner for thirteen years, Curran advised that the picking of Santa Clause was not an official city matter, that the Commission is responsible for the hiring and firing of the Fire Chief, City Manager, and Police Chief. Curran has not made any promises to anyone at BSO about what he plans to do if elected as the next Mayor.

James Curran informed that Andrew Gross, who is a C.E.R.T team member, and his wife, Jennifer Gross, were present during the incident between Mayor Ross and Chief James Bishop. (Refer to James Curran's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On January 13, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from C.E.R.T Team member, Andrew Gross. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Andrew Gross has been a member of the Cooper City C.E.R.T Team for approximately five years and participated in the Holiday Santa Program for the city on December 18, 2021. Andrew assisted as a dispatcher on that night, contacting the families who signed up for the event to let them know Santa was on his way. Andrew had participated in the event on multiple occasions and advised the Santas for each truck had been chosen by the fire chief in the past. Andrew stated that C.E.R.T's Team Coordinator Donna Maksymowich-Waskiewicz, assists with the selection of the elves, who participate in the event on the fire truck. Andrew described the event as a BSO function, coordinated by BSO Fire Rescue.

Prior to the event, Chief James Bishop held a briefing at the fire station, which C.E.R.T Team members and the firefighters attended. Andrew Gross could not recall if Mayor Greg Ross was in attendance, advising Ross is a C.E.R.T team member. Andrew stated one Santa was performed by an unknown retired firefighter, and the other Santa was performed by James Curran, after the previously scheduled firefighter was unable to attend. Andrew has known Curran to perform as Santa for many years and Andrew has not heard of any issues arising from Curran's participation.

During the event at an unknown time, Mayor Greg Ross came to the Fire Station, where Andrew Gross and his wife, Jennifer Gross were assisting with the event. Ross was looking for Chief James Bishop, who had returned to the Fire Station to pick up water for the personnel participating in the event, when Ross took Bishop into the fire chief's office and slammed the door. Andrew advised he could hear Ross screaming at Bishop, but he could not make out what was being said. After

several minutes Ross exited the office and left the fire station. Bishop then exits the office and sits down by Andrew. Andrew described Bishop as looking upset, as Bishop stated, "*the mayor is gonna have me removed.*" Bishop continued that Ross did not approve of James Curran being Santa, and Ross was going to try to have Bishop removed as the fire chief for Cooper City. Bishop explained that he had previously asked Ross if he wanted to be Santa, and Ross had declined. Andrew asked Bishop what he could do to help, because he is very vocal in the city and did not want to lose Bishop as the fire chief.

Following the event, the fire trucks returned to the station, and James Curran took some pictures with the volunteer elves. Curran then informed Andrew Gross that Mayor Ross had shown up on one of the stops during the event screaming and then called City Manager Joseph Napoli to have Chief Bishop fired. Several days later, Andrew contacted BSO Chief Gregory Holness to see what could be done to retain Bishop. Andrew was later informed prior to the Cooper City commission meeting on January 11, 2022, that Bishop was no longer serving as the Cooper City district chief.

Andrew Gross also advised of an incident which occurred during a Cooper City commission meeting on December 14, 2021, in which Chief Bishop was questioned by members of the commission about a commercial structure fire. Andrew explained that Mayor Ross and Commissioner Shrouder were attacking Bishop about the response time required to respond to the call. Andrew feels Ross is using this as a negotiation tactic because Ross wants to end BSO's contract with Cooper City, and have the city establish its own fire department.

Andrew Gross advised he had interacted with Chief Bishop on a regular basis, due to training and meetings due to the C.E.R.T team. Andrew has never had any issues with Bishop's integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. Andrew described Bishop as an amazing man who wanted to help teach the C.E.R.T team members different skills such as using real fire extinguishers and airport disaster drills. Bishop was also described as a hands-on chief, who goes on calls and who is constantly training with the firefighters. Andrew did not feel that Chief Bishop or James Curran benefited by Curran participating as Santa. Andrew continued that Curran loves Christmas and enjoys helping kids.

Andrew Gross advised when Jamie Curran was a commissioner, he would "*butt heads*" with Mayor Ross, and Commissioners Ryan Shrouder, Howard Meltzer, and Massimo Pulcini. Andrew believes that Chief Bishop was removed because he chose someone to perform as Santa who the commissioners did not like. (Refer to Andrew Gross' statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

During the interview with Andrew Gross, he advised the C.E.R.T Program Manager, Donna Maksymowich-Waskiewicz might be able to provide some information about the Holiday Santa Program. I attempted contact with Mrs. Maksymowich-Waskiewicz on two occasions and left a voicemail, requesting her assistance. In addition, I mailed a certified letter to the address listed on her driver's license. At the submission of this report, I have not received a response from Mrs. Maksymowich-Waskiewicz. (Refer to the Memo to the File – Witness Donna Maksymowich-Waskiewicz for details)

On January 13, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from Jennifer Gross. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Jennifer Gross advised that she arrived at BSO Fire Station 28 on Saturday, December 18, 2021, at approximately 5:00 P.M., to visit her husband, Andrew Gross, who was assisting with the Cooper City Holiday Santa Program. Upon arrival Jennifer observed Mayor Greg Ross in the front lobby and asked him why he was there, as she thought he was performing as Santa. Jennifer had heard that Ross was going to be Santa but believed he may have performed as Santa during a city brunch earlier that day. Ross appeared to be angry and agitated, advising he was trying to find out who was Santa. Jennifer found out that James Curran was performing as Santa but did not know who the other Santa on the second truck was.

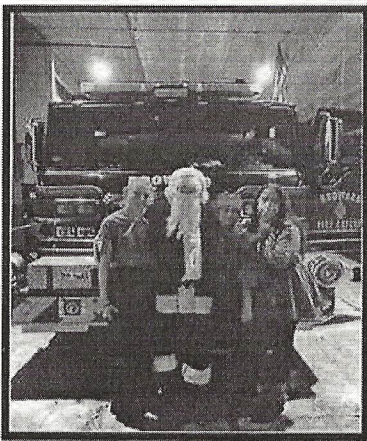
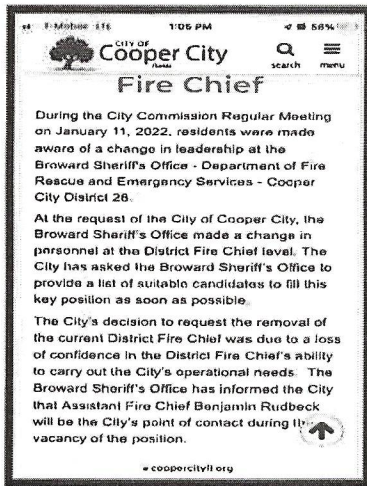
Jennifer Gross stated that Chief James Bishop soon walked into the Fire Station and entered the chief's office, with Mayor Ross following behind and slammed the door. Jennifer could hear Mayor Ross yelling, but she could not understand any of the words that were being said. Jennifer believed the yelling was due to a previous commission meeting which ended with a lot of tension between Ross and Bishop. Jennifer soon went outside with her son to show him the fire trucks for approximately fifteen minutes before leaving the station without any further interaction with Ross or Bishop. Jennifer was later contacted by her husband, Andrew Gross, who explained what Bishop had informed him, following the incident in the chief's office. Jennifer advised that C.E.R.T team members Ray Neice and John Simpson were also present at the time. Jennifer was later informed that Andrew had sent a document to Ross prior to the event, which showed that James Curran was performing as Santa. The document was a schedule for the Holiday Santa Program for Saturday, December 18, 2021, which was provided by Donna Maksymowich-Waskiewicz.

Jennifer Gross also referred to the commission meeting, which occurred on December 14, 2021, that she described as particularly contentious between Mayor Ross and Chief Bishop. During this meeting, Ross was accusing Bishop of lying or providing misleading information regarding a fire response and a fire truck, which was out of service. Jennifer advised that the commission used to go after BSO on the Law Enforcement side until recently, advising they like BSO Captain Christopher DeGiovanni, CCN 13298.

Jennifer Gross did not believe Chief Bishop gained any benefit from allowing James Curran to perform as Santa. Jennifer believed Curran gained the personal satisfaction of performing as Santa, as he wants to be involved in everything. (Refer to Jennifer Gross' statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On January 14, 2022, Jennifer Gross emailed me and provided a link to the Cooper City Commission Meeting for December 14, 2021, which Jennifer and Andrew Gross referenced in their statements. The email also contained a social media release pertaining to the transfer of Chief James Bishop, some photographs of Santa taken by Andrew Gross during the Holiday Santa Event, and a text message sent from Andrew Gross to Mayor Greg Ross, containing a schedule for the event with James Curran listed as Santa.



Saturday December 18 East Side Santa

Please Scan QR code for routing map

STOP #	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	ADDRESS	DEVELOPMENT / SUB-DIVISION	PHONE #	KTR#
1	Arcino	Julie	1692 SW 25 Street	Cooper village	564-444-0023	8
2	Wesley	Kory	14161 S.W. 50 court	Coopers village	564-254-7411	6
3	Francis	Lisa	8100 SW 104 Ave	Cooper village	317-697-9275	8
4	Demetria	Amy	3346 SW 100 Terr	Coopers Place	564-299-1146	3
5	Woodrum	Reid	5030 SW 91 Lane	Country Club West	564-591-3102	1
6	Baker	Ann	2978 SW 99 Court	Country Club West	564-292-7149	4
7	Cooley	Malcolm	9457 SW 53 Court	Summerline east	813-775-9101	1
8	Dallas	Diana	3008 SW 94 Ave	Summerline east	564-551-2021	10
9	Adams	Erin	4240 SW 84 way	The country	564-552-0335	1
10	Scandala	Rosa	15233 SW 92 1/2 Ln	Cooper Colony	564-663-3370	10
11	Arce	Fara	3031 SW 93 Ave	Summerline east	754-381-4772	4
12	Wethayer	Alan	4884 SW 92 Terr	Cooper colony	785-346-7810	2
13	Wright	Laura	8108 SW 82 Terr	Cooper city	564-674-2264	4
14	O'connor	Christy	15211 SW 38 Way	Cooper	564-325-5111	8
15	Hammaker	Lyn	8120 SW 54 Street	Summerline	564-435-2804	1
16	Valdes	Bernabe	6301 SW 38 Street	Cooper Estates	564-293-0205	2
17	Hodgson	Sandra	8689 SW 82 Place	Cooper Colony	564-674-4320	10
18	Clark	Austin	8925 SW 52 Court	Cooper	564-674-2714	2
19	Grondano	Michael	10501 SW 82 Court	Cooper colony	564-438-0188	2
20	Auerly	Michelle	8046 SW 52 Court	Cooper colony	564-300-5146	20
21	Gasper	Amy	6160 SW 80 Ave	Cooper	564-942-1533	3
22	Carraugh	Wendy	8275 SW 88 Terr	Cooper	564-666-0607	1
23	Maryvale	Henry	5007 SW 88 Terr	Cooper	564-674-2014	0
24	Cushing	Laura	1079 SW 48 Street	NA	994214-7187	0
25	Hodgson	Monica	8163 SW 50 Place	Timberlake	564-256-6671	4
26	Odom	Alicey	8704 SW 66 Street	Timberlake	564-305-0381	5
27	Mouradian	Thomas	8025 SW 22 Street	Timberlake	564-292-2829	3
28	Johnson	Tanya	1780 NW 85 Terr	Murphy	564-302-8664	3
29	Marlino	Daniel	2004 Cascade Isles Way	Cascade side	564-215-2001	35
30	Wilson	Bonny	3036 NW 81 Terr	Diamond Head	564-232-0005	2
31	Katze	Carlos	5005 SW 91 Terr	The Cross roads	564-664-2271	1

On January 26, 2022, Jennifer Gross sent me another email with a link to the Cooper City Commission meeting, which occurred on January 25, 2022, in which the commission discussed the new procedures for the selection of the Easter Bunny and Santa.

(Refer to the emails from Jennifer Gross for details)

On January 13, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from C.E.R.T Team member John Simpson. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

John Simpson advised that he has been a member of the C.E.R.T team for approximately four years, and he assisted with the Cooper City Holiday Santa Program on December 18th and 19th, 2021. Simpson believed the Holiday Santa Program was a BSO event which was organized by the fire chief, who was responsible for the assigning of Santa. Prior to the event, Simpson did not know who was performing as Santa. During the event, Simpson would make phone calls to the residents who sign up, to inform them that Santa was on his way. Simpson advised he was stationed in a conference room within Fire Station 28 during the event, along with C.E.R.T team members, Andrew Gross and Ray Neice.

During the event on December 18, 2021, John Simpson recalled Chief James Bishop and Mayor Greg Ross arriving at the Fire Station, going into the chief's office, and closing the door. Simpson could hear arguing and raised voices but could not heard what was being said.

Near the end of the event, John Simpson recalled hearing that Mayor Ross was not happy about Chief Bishop's selection of James Curran to perform as Santa. Simpson advised that Ross and Curran are political opponents, which may be the reason for the argument. Simpson is familiar with both Ross and Curran, as he is an active citizen in Cooper City and participates in the city

commission meeting and city events. Simpson recalled both Ross and Curran performing as Santa in the past and did not know of any reason which would have prevented Curran from performing as Santa. Simpson is aware that Curran is running for the future Mayor of Cooper City and may want to get his name out in the public, just like any politician, but Simpson had not had any discussions with Curran about his interests in being Santa. Simpson did not think Chief Bishop benefited in any way from Curran performing as Santa.

John Simpson described his interactions with Chief Bishop in his involvement with the C.E.R.T Team. Bishop was described as very professional and very friendly, and Simpson did not know of any issues involving Bishop's integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. Simpson had interacted with Bishop during the monthly C.E.R.T team meetings, advising the interactions were all very positive.

John Simpson heard of Chief Bishop's removal as the Cooper City Fire Chief from Andrew Gross and from what he knows of the incident, Simpson feels it is an overreaction and it is unprofessional to smear Bishop's name over this incident. Simpson had not heard of any other reasons for which Bishop was removed from the city, other than the Santa event. (Refer to John Simpson's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

Following the interviews with Andrew Gross and John Simpson, Raymond Neice and Annette Neice were identified as possible witnesses for this investigation. On January 14th and 18th, 2022, I attempted contact by phone with both parties. In addition, a certified letter was sent to both parties at their home address, requesting their assistance in this investigation. At the submission of this report, I have not received a response from Mr. and Mrs. Neice. (Refer to the Memo to the File – Witnesses Raymond and Annette Neice for details)

BSO Witnesses

On January 14, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from BSO Fire Rescue Captain Gonzalo Garcia, CCN 16257. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Captain Gonzalo Garcia has been a firefighter for thirty-one years and has worked with BSO since 2011. Garcia is currently assigned to Cooper City Fire Station 28 as a Captain. Gonzalo participated in the Cooper City Holiday Santa Program, on December 18, 2021, as he and Driver/Engineer Shawn Mock, CCN 13456, were riding in the Fire Truck, which carried James Curran as Santa. Gonzalo advised the event is organized by BSO, via the District Chief, James Bishop, and Fire Rescue Administrative Specialist II, Reyna Varela, CCN 13497.

On the day of the event, Captain Garcia was informed he would be riding on the truck with Santa. Prior to the event, Garcia did not know who was going to be Santa for his truck. Garcia found out before the event that James Curran was going to be Santa, when Chief Bishop provided him with a home address in which to pick Curran up from. Garcia advised this was his first time participating in the program, but he had heard that Curran performed as Santa in the past. Garcia has personally met James Curran in the past, and upon picking up Curran from his residence, Garcia could barely tell that it was Curran in the costume.

After picking up James Curran, Captain Garcia's truck began responding to residences on their list. On approximately the second stop, Captain Garcia greeted Mayor Greg Ross, who arrived on scene and asked, "How is John?" Garcia asked Ross which John he was referring to, as Ross replied, "That's what I thought," and walked away. Garcia did not know why Ross was asking about a person named John, and he did not see Ross interact with James Curran. Garcia did not receive any complaints during the evening in relation to Curran performing as Santa. At the end of the event, they returned to the fire station, where Chief Bishop picked up Curran and drove him home. Garcia did not witness any interactions between Bishop and Curran with any city officials upon returning to the station.

Captain Garcia did not feel that James Curran received any personal or professional benefit from performing as Santa, advising that you could barely recognize Curran while he was wearing the Santa suit. During all the stops during the event, Garcia did not observe Curran say anything political, advising the event was all about the kids. Garcia did not hear Curran introduce himself by his name to any of the residents, but only referred to himself as Santa. Garcia did not feel that Chief Bishop benefited in any way by allowing Curran to perform as Santa. (Refer to Captain Gonzalo Garcia's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On January 15, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from BSO Fire Rescue Driver/Engineer Shawn Mock, CCN 13456. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Driver/Engineer Shawn Mock has been a firefighter for twenty-one years and was assigned to Cooper City Fire Station 28. During his career, Mock had participated in the Holiday Santa Program approximately eight or nine times in the past. Mock was unsure who oversaw scheduling the event but advised his point of contact was either Chief James Bishop or his assistant, Reyna Varela. Within a week of the event on December 18, 2021, Mock was informed that he would be participating as a driver of one of the two fire trucks for the event. Mock advised Captain Gonzalo Garcia, Santa, and two elves would be riding on the truck. One of the elves was his daughter, who he did not want to participate in this investigation, and another unknown teenage female explorer.

Prior to the event, a briefing was held by Chief James Bishop at Fire Station 28, and just prior to leaving the station, Shawn Mock learned that James Curran was going to perform as Santa for his truck. Curran, who was not present at the briefing, was picked up from his residence while enroute to the first stop of the event. Curran was then picked up from his residence in a full Santa costume, which Mock stated he could not recognize Curran until he approached the truck. Mock recalled Curran performing as Santa approximately three to four times in the past, and Mock had not heard of any issues arising from Curran's participation. During the event, Mock did not hear Curran identify himself to the residents by anything other than Santa:

Shawn Mock advised Mayor Greg Ross arrived on scene during one of the stops and asked about John. Mock did not know what Ross was talking about, and Ross walked away saying, "that's it. that's all I need to know." Mock did not know of a John and had not been previously informed of who would be performing as Santa for the event.

At the end of the event, Mock drove the truck back to Fire Station 28 with James Curran on board. Upon arrival at the station, Mock began preparing the truck to be back in service and did not see where Curran had gone. Mock did not witness any interactions with any Cooper City Officials and Chief Bishop on that night. Mock had later heard that Mayor Ross had stopped by but did not hear what Ross had spoken about. Mock did not have any contact with Bishop or any city officials following the event, and Mock had not spoken with Curran since the event.

Shawn Mock did not feel that Chief Bishop or James Curran benefitted in any way from Curran performing as Santa for this event. Mock has known Bishop for his whole career and has not had any issues with Bishop's integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. (Refer to Driver/Engineer Shawn Mock's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On February 1, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from BSO Administrative Specialist II Reyna Varela, CCN 13497. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Administrative Specialist Reyna Varela is assigned to Cooper City Fire Rescue as the assistant to the Fire Chief and has been in that position for twenty-four years. Varela had worked directly with Chief James Bishop since he arrived as the Cooper City District Chief in February 2021. Varela advised the Holiday Santa Program has existed for approximately thirty-five years, back when Cooper City had a volunteer Fire Department.

Reyna Varela explained the people participating in the Holiday Santa Program as elves or Santa are volunteers, who do not receive any payment or benefit from participating. Varela was responsible for the registration for the event, which includes advertising and purchasing the supplies needed. Varela advised all the scheduling and logistics of the event is coordinated via BSO Fire Rescue, with the city being advised of the dates of the event. Varela was not involved in the scheduling of the volunteers who participated as the elves or Santa, advising that was Chief James Bishop's responsibility. Varela had been informed by Bishop that a former Fire Rescue employee named "John" was originally scheduled to perform as Santa. Varela had later learned that "John" was unable to attend, and Curran stepped in to perform as Santa. Varela explained that the C.E.R.T Team Coordinator, Donna Maksymowich-Waskiewicz, was responsible for providing volunteers to perform as the elves during the event.

Reyna Varela has been involved with the Holiday Santa Program for many years and advised that James Curran has participated as Santa several times. Varela had not heard of any issues in the past concerning Curran performing as Santa. Varela advised Curran is very involved with the community and she is not aware of any personal or professional gain Curran would obtain from performing as Santa. Varela did not believe that Chief Bishop would have benefited in any way by allowing Curran to perform as Santa. Varela informed that Mayor Greg Ross has also performed as Santa in the past, and this year she had not received any information about Ross wanting to be Santa. Varela did not hear of any attempts to conceal Curran's participation in the Holiday Santa Program. Chief Bishop later informed Varela that Mayor Ross was unhappy about Curran performing as Santa.

Varela had worked with Chief Bishop for approximately ten years during their careers. During that time, Varela never had any concerns about Bishop's integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. (Refer to Reyna Varela's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On May 4, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from BSO Fire Rescue Battalion Chief Mike Bufalo, CCN 13402. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Battalion Chief Mike Bufalo has been a firefighter for approximately twenty-three years and has personally known Chief James Bishop for his entire career. Bufalo had heard of Bishop's removal as Cooper City's district chief and had then contacted Bishop. Bishop informed Bufalo of an incident with Mayor Greg Ross, involving the selection of a former Cooper City Commissioner, James Curran, to perform as Santa during the annual Holiday Santa Program. Bufalo was not told who was originally scheduled to be Santa but heard the person had backed out at the last minute, so Curran filled in the position. Bishop told Bufalo that he was probably going to be removed as District Chief from Cooper City due to the selection of Curran to perform as Santa.

Mike Bufalo, who is a resident of Cooper City, advised that the Holiday Santa Program has been going on for more than twenty-five years, with James Curran taking part in the event for many years. Bufalo had not heard of any previous issues involving Curran performing as Santa, advising everyone loves and adores him. Bufalo believes there may be some animosity between Curran and both Mayor Ross and Commissioner Ryan Shrouder, advising they don't like Curran. Bufalo did not believe Chief Bishop benefited in any way from allowing Curran to perform as Santa.

Mike Bufalo did not believe that Chief Bishop had attempted to deceive any Cooper City Officials about who was performing as Santa for the event. During the time that Bufalo has known Bishop, he has never known any issues involving Bishop's integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. (Refer to Battalion Chief Mike Bufalo's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On May 9, 2022, I obtained a sworn recorded witness statement from BSO Fire Chief Executive Director Gregory Holness, CCN 12696. The following is synopsis of that statement [In-Part]:

Fire Chief Gregory Holness has been a firefighter for approximately thirty-nine years, and he is the Executive Director for BSO, who oversees all the sworn and unsworn employees of Fire Rescue. Holness advised that he was aware of the incident involving District Chief James Bishop and Cooper City, where a request was made to remove Bishop as the District Chief.

Chief Holness advised that he had been contacted by Chief Bishop, who informed him of an incident surrounding the Cooper City Holiday Santa Program. Mayor Gregory Ross was upset about who Bishop had scheduled to perform as Santa and advised Holness that he may receive a phone call from the city. Bishop informed Holness that he had to make a switch to James Curran as Santa, and he did not advise Holness who was originally scheduled to be Santa. Holness advised the scheduling of this event is handled at the district level, and he was not involved in any way.

On December 19, 2021, Chief Holness received a phone call from the Cooper City Manager Joseph Napoli, who advised Chief Bishop was not forthcoming with information involving the Santa who was participating in the event. Napoli continued that the person who was riding in the truck as Santa was not the original individual and Mayor Greg Ross was upset. Ross then took the phone from Napoli and advised Holness that he wanted Bishop fired for not being truthful. Holness was not given any indication as to how Bishop had been untruthful during the conversation. Holness was not given any other reasons for removing Bishop, other than who Bishop selected as Santa for the Holiday Santa Program.

Chief Holness also received a phone call from Cooper City Commissioner Jeff Green and C.E.R.T team member Andrew Gross. Green advised that he had full faith in Chief Bishop, and Gross informed that Mayor Ross was blowing the incident out of proportion. Gross informed Holness that James Curran was riding on the fire truck as Santa, and there was supposed to be someone else performing as Santa. Holness was unaware of any policy which would prevent Curran from riding on the vehicle as Santa.

At 1:00 P.M., on December 30, 2021, Chief Holness attended a meeting with City Manager Napoli and Mayor Ross at the City Manager's office in Cooper City. Ross advised that he had no faith in Chief Bishop, who was described as untrustworthy by not disclosing information Ross should have been privy to. Holness' discussions with Napoli and Ross were surrounding the incident involving the selection of James Curran as Santa. During the meeting, Ross displayed his cellphone to Holness, which showed pictures of a Santa sitting in the cab of a fire truck. Ross stated the pictures showed James Curran, who should not have been Santa. Upon viewing the pictures, Holness did not believe they were any indication of any wrongdoing by Bishop. Ross did not provide the pictures to Holness. Holness stated there was no resolution made following the meeting about Chief Bishop's position, and Napoli called later that day, informing that they want Bishop removed.

Chief Holness advised the allegations made by Mayor Ross and City Manager Napoli of Chief Bishop's integrity and trustworthiness, made him inform BSO Internal Affairs, due to the possibility of policy violations. Holness requested a formal correspondence from the city, outlining the allegations against Chief Bishop, to begin the investigation. Napoli sent an email to Holness on January 5, 2022, as well as a letter to Sheriff Gregory Tony on January 10, 2022, which were both previously mentioned in this report. Holness informed that he notified Undersheriff Nicole Anderson, CCN 8182, of the allegations, but she did not attend any of the meetings with any Cooper City officials. Bishop was removed from Cooper City as District Chief on January 11, 2022 and was transferred to the Public Safety Building to work with the Fire Rescue Training Division. Holness advised there was no official transfer order made, as there were no available openings for his position.

Chief Holness has known Chief Bishop since the early 2000's, and has never known any issues involving his integrity, trustworthiness, or truthfulness. Following all the conversations he has had with City Manager Napoli and Mayor Ross, Holness believed the reason for Bishop's removal was due to James Curran performing as Santa. Holness also believed that this was due to Curran running for mayor in Cooper City's next election. Holness had not spoken to any other Cooper City Officials who expressed that there was an unsustainable relationship, as expressed in Napoli's email dated, January 5, 2022. (Refer to Chief Gregory Holness' statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

Cooper City Commission Meetings

The Cooper City Commission meeting for December 14, 2021, was accessed utilizing the link provided by Jennifer Gross in her email dated January 14, 2022. The following is a synopsis of the interaction between District Chief James Bishop and the Cooper City Commission, which took place between 03:12:07 to 03:49:16 of the meeting (In-Part).

- **03:12:10 – 03:14:00** - Mayor Greg Ross addressed Chief James Bishop as he approached the podium. Chief James Bishop provided the end of year report for Cooper City Fire Rescue and advised of a rollover crash in which Fire Rescue responded. Bishop advised he had fine-tuned the routing for the Holiday Santa Program, and the program will be ready for the event on the upcoming Saturday and Sunday.
- **03:14:38 – 03:26:00** - Mayor Ross questioned Chief Bishop about a Fire Rescue call at an apartment complex within Cooper City. Bishop advised a sprinkler had been activated, but there was no fire on scene. Ross inquired as to specifically which Fire Rescue vehicles responded to the call. As Bishop was reading off the list of vehicles, Ross stopped Bishop after he informed truck Platform 28 had responded. Ross mentioned that Platform 28 was previously out of service for maintenance and asked how the truck could have responded to the call if it was unavailable. Bishop explained the loaner fire truck, Engine 228, was still given the same radio designator as the vehicle it was replacing, Platform 28. Ross stated that Bishop was providing incorrect information in the report, which could present a problem during an audit. Bishop then clarified the report received by the commission was sent via “PulsePoint,” which Bishop does not control the information via that database. Ross then questioned Bishop in reference to the response time of approximately ten minutes to respond to the aforementioned call. Bishop explained the response time is based upon the regulations in place for safety and the distance to the call. Ross asked Bishop what is being done to correct the response time, to which Bishop replied, the city needs to build another Fire Station.
- **03:26:00 – 03:49:16** – Chief Bishop discussed the mutual aid contracts with surrounding cities, the locations of the various ladder trucks within the county, and the various methods to decrease the response times to calls. (Refer to the Cooper City Commission meeting 12-14-2021 for details)

[End of Synopsis]

The Cooper City Commission meeting for January 11, 2022, was accessed utilizing the link located on the Cooper City website (CooperCityFL.org). The following is a synopsis of the public statements made by Battalion Chief Mike Bufalo, Andrew Gross, and Cooper City Commissioner Jeff Green, which took place between 01:02:53 to 01:34:02 of the meeting (In-Part).

- **01:02:53 - 01:05:28** - Battalion Chief Mike Bufalo spoke to the commission about Cooper City’s purchasing of new fire trucks.
- **01:05:28 - 01:07:37** - Chief Bufalo advised he learned Chief James Bishop had been removed from Cooper City earlier that day, January 11, 2022. Bufalo had then called Bishop, who advised that prior to the Holiday Santa Program, one of the individuals who was scheduled to

perform as Santa was unable to attend. Bishop then asked James Curran to perform as Santa, as Curran has done in the past as a former Cooper City Commissioner. Bishop explained that a member of the commission asked him why Curran was performing as Santa, and the decision was going to cost him his position as Fire Chief in Cooper City. The commission member then called the city manager of Cooper City. Bufalo advised that he found the decision to remove Bishop, extremely disheartening.

- **01:20:45 - 01:24:51** - Andrew Gross explained he was a former member of the Cooper City Public Safety Board and expressed his displeasure with the commission's handling of purchasing of new fire trucks. Gross then discussed the removal of Chief Bishop, and advised he was present during the incident where doors were slammed and screaming occurred with one of the commission members. Gross did not feel a commission member would be able to remove Bishop without bringing the matter before the commission.
- **01:27:52 – 01:34:15** - Cooper City Commissioner Jeff Green addressed the commission in reference to Andrew Gross' comments. Green advised the responsibility of replacing fire trucks used to fall upon the county until Cooper City signed its recent contract, which passed the responsibility to Cooper City. Green then stated the removal of Chief Bishop is the city manager's responsibility, and Green did not have any conversations with City Manager Joseph Napoli about the removal. Green did not support the removal of Bishop, and stated Bishop was doing a phenomenal job. Green hoped the decision to remove Bishop was not due to someone riding on the fire truck as Santa. (Refer to the Cooper City Commission meeting 01-11-2022 for details)

[End off Synopsis]

The Cooper City Commission meeting for January 25, 2022, was accessed utilizing the link provided by Jennifer Gross in her email dated January 26, 2022. The following is a synopsis of the interactions between the member of the city commission discussing the selection of the Easter Bunny for an upcoming city event, which took place between 03:50:46 to 03:50:00 of the meeting (In-Part).

- **03:50:46 - 03:52:00** - Cooper City Commissioner Ryan Shrouder addressed the commission in reference to the selection of the Easter Bunny for an upcoming city event. Shrouder proposed the city manager will make arrangements for the event to prevent outside people from participating. The people selected for the event will be COVID tested, and background checked prior to the event. (Refer to the Cooper City Commission meeting 01-25-2022 for details)

[End of Synopsis]

On June 1, 2022, I obtained a sworn Garrity statement from District Chief James Bishop, CCN 13394. Also present from the Division of Internal Affairs was Sergeant Shanda Martin, CCN 15128. The following is a synopsis of that report [In-Part]:

District Chief James Bishop has been a firefighter for approximately thirty-eight years, and has been with BSO since 2004, when Cooper City merged with BSO Fire Rescue. In February of 2021, Bishop was promoted to District Chief and was assigned to Cooper City.

Chief Bishop is very familiar with the Holiday Santa Program, as he had worked most of his career in Cooper City and has been involved with the event for the past thirty six-years. Bishop explained the program is a fire department function, with the donations raised during the event going to the city. As the district chief, Bishop was responsible for the organization of the event on December 18th and 19th, 2021, with the assistance of Administrative Specialist Reyna Varela. Bishop advised the city was not involved in the scheduling or logistics of the event. Bishop stated that the city has never had to approve the selection of any of the event's participants, nor did he recall any issues with any participants of the event in the past.

Chief Bishop previously asked Mayor Greg Ross if he would like to perform as Santa for the 2021 Holiday Santa Program, and Ross declined. Bishop then requested a retired firefighter, who he could only remember as to the first name of John, to perform as Santa. Bishop then asked James Curran to be on standby as Santa for the 2021 event, as Curran was a former Cooper City Commissioner and had played Santa in the past. As the event got closer, Bishop was unable to confirm John's attendance, and requested Curran to fill in as Santa. At the time, Bishop did not know Mayor Ross had any issues with Curran, advising they used to be friends when they both served on the Cooper City commission. Bishop advised he did not attempt to conceal or deceive any Cooper City officials by having Curran perform as Santa.

Chief Bishop advised that John was a retired firefighter employed by Tamarac Fire Rescue or North Lauderdale Fire Rescue, who he would run into on calls when Bishop worked in the adjoining city of Lauderdale Lakes. Bishop did not know John's last name or have his contact information at the time of this interview, but he would attempt to locate the information.

During the first night of the event, on December 18, 2021, Mayor Ross rode with Chief Bishop in Bishop's vehicle, which was following one of the two fire trucks carrying Santa. Ross then requested to go back to the station, as he wanted to get into his own vehicle and go see the other fire truck and Santa. Mayor Ross did not give any indication to Bishop as to why he wanted to see the other fire truck. Bishop was later informed via the radio to return to the station where he met with Mayor Ross.

Upon returning to the station, Mayor Ross confronted Chief Bishop about James Curran's participation in the event. Bishop informed Ross that Curran's participation was a last-minute change. Ross then asked if Curran was a firefighter, commissioner, or C.E.R.T team member, to which Bishop replied no. Ross then told Bishop that he was going to have him removed from his position in Cooper City. Bishop had not been informed by any other city officials about any displeasure in Bishop's performance as district chief. Following the interaction with Mayor Ross, Bishop then contacted Chief Gregory Holness and informed him that Ross was not happy about the selection of Curran as Santa. Bishop advised that he was not untruthful in any statement he made to any city officials regarding the Holiday Santa Program. Bishop believed the issue with Curran performing as Santa was probably political in nature.

Chief Bishop then explained the issue Mayor Ross had concerning the status reports in the Cooper City commission meeting regarding the fire truck (Platform 28). Ross receives alerts on his phone via "PulsePoint", which is a 911 connected mobile app which informs of emergencies in an area. Ross was alerted that Platform 28 had responded to a call, although Bishop had previously advised him the truck was out of service for repair. Another fire truck was used to replace Platform 28 and was utilizing the same radio designator for dispatch purposes. Bishop explained the process of

changing the radio designator consists of reprogramming the truck radio and handheld radios, and the battalion chiefs are already aware of what vehicles are out of service. Bishop advised he was not attempting to deceive the commission by not switching out the radio designator for Platform 28.

Chief Bishop responded to Cooper City Commissioner Massimo Pulcini's statement about Bishop being antagonistic and dismissive toward Mayor Greg Ross during the commission meetings. Bishop understood how Pulcini could feel this way, as Bishop described his interactions with Ross as being sarcastic. Ross believed that BSO owes Cooper City a Quint, which is a dual-purpose ladder and fire engine with a 300-gallon water tank. Bishop stated that he was constantly asked by Ross to know the location of the Quint, and Bishop would jokingly tell him that it was located at the BSO motor pool in Fort Lauderdale.

Chief Bishop believed he was ultimately removed from Cooper City because Mayor Ross did not like who he chose to perform as Santa. Looking back at this incident, Bishop advised he would have performed as Santa himself, as he had done so in the past. (Refer to District Chief James Bishop's statement for details)

[End of Synopsis]

Following the Garrity statement with District Chief James Bishop on June 1, 2022, I sent him an email requesting the name and contact information for the retired firefighter "John", who was originally asked to perform as Santa. Bishop was asked to provide this information by June 8, 2022. (Refer to the email thread to District Chief James Bishop for details)

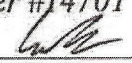
On June 8, 2022, I received an email from Chief James Bishop advising he has not been successful in locating "John", or finding any contact information for him. (Refer to the email thread to District Chief James Bishop for details)

END OF REPORT.


I, THE UNDERSIGNED INVESTIGATOR, DO HEREBY SWEAR OR AFFIRM, UNDER PENALTY OF PERJURY, THAT, TO THE BEST OF MY PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION, AND BELIEF, I HAVE NOT KNOWINGLY OR WILLFULLY DEPRIVED, OR ALLOWED ANOTHER TO DEPRIVE, THE SUBJECT OF THE INVESTIGATION OF ANY OF THE RIGHTS CONTAINED IN ss. 112.532 AND 112.533, FLORIDA STATUTES.

UNDER PENALTIES OF PERJURY, I DECLARE THAT I HAVE READ THE FOREGOING REPORT CONSISTING OF __ PAGES, EACH OF WHICH HAS BEEN INITIALED BY THIS INVESTIGATOR, AND THAT THE FACTS STATED IN IT ARE TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE, INFORMATION, AND BELIEF.

Sgt. Christopher Sutter #14701

	<u>14701</u>	<u>6-14-2022</u>
INVESTIGATOR	CCN	DATE

THE FOREGOING REPORT HAS BEEN REVIEWED AND APPROVED BY:

	<u>1174</u>	<u>6-14-2022</u>
Lt. Johanna Palacio	CCN	DATE
REVIEWING SUPERVISOR	CCN	DATE