

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF MARYLAND
(Northern Division)**

Caroline County Branch of the
National Association for the
Advancement of Colored People, *et al.*,

Plaintiffs,

v.

Civil Action No. 23-cv-00484-SAG

Town of Federalsburg, Maryland,

Defendant.

DECLARATION OF DARLENE PITT HAMMOND

1. I, Darlene Pitt Hammond, am over 18 years of age and am competent to testify. I submit this declaration upon personal knowledge in support of Plaintiffs' motion for preliminary injunction in this matter.

2. I am a Black registered voter residing in Caroline County and I currently live in Federalsburg.

3. I moved to Caroline County when I was in fifth grade and graduated from Colonel Richardson High School in Federalsburg.

4. I have worked as an IV pharmacy technician at the University of Maryland Hospital in Easton, Maryland for over twenty (20) years.

5. I am a single mother and raised my two children in Federalsburg. They also graduated from Colonel Richardson High School. Today, my daughter is a Chief in the Navy and my son is a Corpsman in the Marines. My granddaughter is also in the Navy. I am extremely proud of them.

6. I was always a very hands-on parent, and have always been active in the community. Currently, I am a member of the Lions Club and the Outreach Coordinator and Event Planner on the Board of Directors for the Federalsburg Activity Center.

7. I am a people person and I love getting to know people. I am the person everyone comes to when they need help, because they know I will be a resource and an advocate for them.

8. I have also been active in registering people to vote and helping with elections, including serving as an election “Chief Judge” for the Board of Elections when Barack Obama was running for President.

9. I began attending Town Council meetings in 2007 after I discovered there was mold in my house. I had gone to my doctor because I had started coughing at night. The doctor told me that if I didn’t move out of my house, I would develop permanent lung damage. When the insurance company inspected my house, they found mold all over the house, with the worst being in my bedroom.

10. I learned that the plot of land on which my house was built was actually a wetland, where houses never should have been built. At the time, the State Senator Richard Colburn was the Town Manager, and he served as the President of People for Better Housing. Despite this, the Town made the decision to place a housing subdivision directly on wetlands, and my house was one of the houses in that subdivision.

11. This dangerous and irresponsible decision still affects me over 12 years later. I still have to see a pulmonologist monthly because of the effect the mold had on my lungs.

12. My experience discovering mold in my house and realizing that it was a result of a decision made by my local officials motivated me to run for an open seat on the Town Council. I

ran because I believed I could make a difference. When I believe in something, I am the kind of person who feels the need to step up and be part of the solution.

13. I really believed I could win. A lot of people know me and like me from all of my involvement in different organizations and activities in the community. People know that I am a good mother and a good person.

14. About two weeks before the election, the Town announced that there would be public platform where the candidates would have to speak in front of an audience. In all of my experience with elections in Federalsburg, there had never been anything similar to this. Additionally, several candidates were allowed to declare candidacies at the last minute. The new candidates were older white people, and I was shocked they were even interested in running. I felt they joined just to stop me from winning.

15. At the public platform event, the predominantly white audience had the opportunity to ask questions of the candidates. When a member of the audience asked what I thought I could do as a member of the Council, I told them my personal story and how important it was for me to advocate for others. I mentioned that I could bring a different outlook and diversity to the Council.

16. As soon as I used the word “diversity,” I felt something in the room shift. Even though most of the people in the room knew me and liked me, it felt like they suddenly became threatened. They asked me what I meant by “diversity,” and I truthfully pointed out that we live in a diverse community, yet I was the only Black candidate up there. But by that point, it felt like no one was listening to me anymore. I immediately knew that it was a huge mistake to mention diversity.

17. Two weeks later, I lost the election.

18. I have never heard of another public platform event for a local election.

19. I still feel disappointed by the way that election was handled. I feel that the town went out of its way to make sure I did not win, by introducing new candidates late in the process and creating a new event that was never required of any candidate before or after. I still get choked up when think about the way I was treated.

20. I ran for Town Council because I love the community and the town of Federalsburg. I believed we could come together and celebrate our diverse community, and that my presence on the Council would provide some much-needed representation for the Black community. There's never been anyone up there that looks like me.

21. Even though I lost, they could never stop me from being a part of this community. I continue to be actively involved in community organizations and non-profits, and I continue to work to improve the town and make life better for the people in it. I believe that changing the election system in Federalsburg is one important way to do so. I would not consider running for office again under the current election system.

###

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct according to the best of my knowledge, information, and belief.

Executed on:

Date: March 8, 2023



Darlene Pitt Hammond