

Subject: Fw: SPD Investigation of Threats Against Elected Official
From: Sawant, Kshama
Sent: Wednesday, February 3, 2021 11:43 AM
To: Durkan, Jenny <Jenny.Durkan@seattle.gov>; Diaz, Adrian <Adrian.Diaz@seattle.gov>; Scoggins, Harold D <Harold.Scoggins@seattle.gov>
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Subject: SPD Investigation of Threats Against Elected Official

On Tuesday, December 19, I wrote to you requesting an investigation into a series of ominous threats sent from a Seattle Fire Department employee's email account to my Council Office email address. Because of the serious nature of these emails — their threatening content, the fact that they were escalating in nature, potentially linked to the recent right-wing protests, and sent from an official City of Seattle email account — I asked that they be taken seriously.

I received responses from each of you assuring me there would be an immediate and thorough investigation.

Unfortunately, this does not appear to be happening.

I appreciate that I was contacted by a Seattle Police Department (SPD) detective on Wednesday, January 20. However, I am concerned about what appears to be a lackadaisical approach being taken by the SPD and by the nature of the police interview itself.

In the two weeks since that time, the only update on this serious matter was a short email a week ago from the detective assuring me the "investigation is progressing," but saying they couldn't provide me with any information because it was an open case under investigation.

The SPD has, however, found the time to talk about my case to the right-wing media, including the local Jason Rantz Show. [Rantz decries](#) that I "never actually contacted" the Seattle Police about the threats, as allegedly reported to him by the department. In point of fact (not that facts matter much within the strain of "journalism" practiced by Rantz), the public letter I sent two weeks ago requesting a serious investigation in the wake of the fourth threatening email was of course addressed to you, SPD interim Chief Diaz, as head of the police. Prior to that, as you know, I had been assured by the Fire Department leadership, on December 31, that a departmental investigation had been opened into the threats. I naturally gave time for this investigation to go forward with what I hoped would be due seriousness and urgency. It was only when the email threats continued from the same Fire Department employee account, and became increasingly menacing, that two weeks later that I escalated the matter to Chief Diaz and Mayor Durkan.

Unfortunately, my subsequent discussion with the SPD detective did little to reassure me the matter was being taken seriously by the police.

In that interview, the detective indicated that the SPD had not questioned the Fire Department leadership, their investigator, nor the Fire Department employee. When I asked at what time the police intended to follow through on these steps to find the source of the death threats, the detective seemed to be in no hurry at all. Apparently they had learned that the employee in question “is on leave,” and that the SPD “may” try to establish contact with him “in the next few days.” The detective instead focused on detailed, irrelevant questions relating to me and my office: when I had read each specific email, how each email made me “feel,” whether it was myself or my staff who first opened each email. I failed to understand the purpose of most of the detective’s questions, but sought to give helpful answers nonetheless. I was struck by the fact that the detective repeatedly seemed to have trouble even recalling the name of the Fire Department employee from whose account the threatening emails had been sent. Unfortunately, it became clear to me over the course of the interview that there was no immediate effort underway to follow up on the threat itself.

This seeming lack of urgency, or even interest, by the police is disturbing in the context of these escalating threats toward my office, and in the wider context of far right violence like that recently seen in the Capitol. But of course there was no greater sense of urgency felt by the Capitol police themselves on or before January 6 — the riots were organized in the open on social media and yet no preparations were made. On the day of the riot, the right-wing mob was allowed to walk right into the Capitol building, in sharp contrast to the violent crackdown against peaceful Black Lives Matter protesters all summer.

It is deeply concerning to me that these threats against my office began in mid December, and now six weeks later, apparently nothing much is known and nothing has yet been done. How is this possible?

I could not help but feel that this disinterest by the Seattle Police is the experience so many people of color, working-class people, poor people, and women have when they contact them about potential or actual violence. One can only imagine how much less concern is shown for threats facing ordinary people in our city who are not elected officials and who do not have the public platform with which to raise their concerns.

Of course, this has in fact been the repeated experience of marginalized groups in Seattle, and far worse. It’s the reason a woman is [currently suing Seattle Police for not taking her rape case seriously](#) because she was homeless. This rape victim reported that the detective marked the case inactive after doing the bare minimum to follow up with her and while leaving the rape kit untested. And as the Black Lives Matter movement has repeatedly brought forward, there have been 28 police killings in Seattle since the federal consent decree was established in 2011 without a single instance of justice for the families or community.

I have the following questions which I would like answered as soon as possible:

- Why were the Seattle Police in contact with the right wing media about my case, misrepresenting the investigation process, at the same time as I was given no update on its progress?
- Why did the Fire Department leadership not notify the Police Department of these threats when they became aware of them in late December (as indicated by their

email to me on December 31)? Is this normal departmental procedure by the Fire Department leadership — to fail to notify the Seattle Police about a departmental investigation of death threats against an elected official?

- What was done by Fire Department leadership after discovering these emails and launching their investigation? They reported that “The SFD [Seattle Fire Department] employee is claiming that he did not send the emails.” If this is so, and the SFD investigator believed the employee’s email account had been hacked, did they take even the basic steps to prevent further serious breaches of security, such as securing the employee’s account and resetting their password? If they did take these steps, how is it possible that two more threatening emails have been sent to my office from the same account since that time? Have they taken these steps even now?
- A technical question: did the investigators believe the email address has been “spoofed,” that the emails may not actually have originated from this employee’s account, and therefore they should not be taken seriously? I am no expert, but as a former IT professional, the message headers appear to me to indicate that these emails were sent, received and validated internally via the City’s Microsoft Outlook/Exchange Server system, not sent externally. If that is true, it would mean that they were almost certainly sent from the employee’s account, and if this employee did not in fact personally send the emails, it would indicate a very serious security breach calling for a high level of urgency (rather than to be allowed to continue for at least three weeks after the SFD investigation began).
- Was the SFD leadership somehow not aware that the threatening emails had continued since they informed my office of their investigation on December 31? How is this possible? Isn’t this the most basic form of follow through on such an investigation — to ensure that the threats do not continue? If the SFD leadership did know, why was I not contacted and made aware of the danger and steps being taken? Why were Seattle Police still not notified?

Again, I appreciate your assurances that these threats will be taken seriously. But so far I see no evidence that this has yet happened at any stage of this process. Given the recent growth of right-wing violence, I believe far greater urgency needs to be brought to such threats faced by people of color, women, and working class people.

As I said in my previous email, while the threats are directly at me personally, I recognize that they are in fact directed against our entire movement. I am being attacked as a means of trying to intimidate all who dare to fight for workers’ rights and against the racism, sexism, and oppression which stem from the capitalist system. This attack on Black Lives Matter and social movements requires a serious response.

Finally, I believe working people and people of color in Seattle need to know where the investigation stands regarding the Seattle Police officers who were present in the Capitol on January 6. At first we were told there were two SPD officers present, [now we are informed there were at least five](#). According to KUOW, this is the [largest known contingent of police](#) to be present in D.C. at the time of the riot. Were they involved in the attempted coup, and if so, will they be fired? I do not believe this is a problem of a few bad apples, but a serious systemic problem of right-wing ideas within the department going up to the top, as further evidenced by Seattle Police Officer’s Guild President Mike Solan’s outrageous comments

attempting to blame Black Lives Matter and the left for the Capitol riot. It is utterly stunning that it appears Solan may face no consequences for his racist, right-wing remarks. Will the SPD leadership and the city's political establishment be carrying out an investigation into links between right-wing groups and officers in the department, or will this dangerous situation be allowed to fester?

Councilmember Kshama Sawant