

Antoinette Hodge - Uniontown Treasurer

“Uniontown city treasurer-elect to take office following controversy”

“UNIONTOWN, Pa. — The city of Uniontown has agreed to allow city Treasurer-elect Antoinette Hodge to take office, the Uniontown city solicitor confirmed Thursday.

On Wednesday, Hodge sued Uniontown, alleging she was denied office because she is African-American. Hodge has said that a City Council member and the city clerk conspired to keep her from getting an insurance bond that is required for her to hold office.

On Wednesday, the bond was approved, and on Thursday afternoon, the city solicitor told Pittsburgh's Action News 4 that Hodge will be able to take office. Hodge is scheduled to be sworn in on Monday. She will be Uniontown's first African-American city treasurer.

Under state law, some elected officials are required to be bonded.

Hodge says she was denied a bond after City Council member Martin Gatti made a racist comment to the bonding company.

"This councilman told the bonding people 'this colored girl' shouldn't sit as the treasurer for the city of Uniontown," said Joel Sansone, Hodge's attorney.

"It was like, you've got to be kidding me, because by now you would figure people are over that. We've had a black president," Hodge said.

On Wednesday, Hodge filed a federal lawsuit against Gatti, the city of Uniontown and City Clerk Kim Marshall, who is Gatti's sister-in-law. The lawsuit accuses Gatti, Marshall and the city of conspiring to keep Hodge from taking office.

Hodge is also seeking an injunction to force the city to seat her as treasurer.

At a news conference announcing the lawsuit, Pennsylvania NAACP President Kenneth Houston said, "This is the most blatant form of ignorance that I have ever seen or heard of in my 50-plus years of living."

At a council meeting Monday, Gatti denied making any racist remarks.

"I have never ever been accused of anything racial in my life," he said. "Finances are finances. I don't know how race got in this."

In a statement responding to the lawsuit Wednesday, Gatti said: "I did not nor have I ever made a political or professional decision based on race. I had every right to follow up on her bond status and whether or not all the facts were provided when the (bond) company found out that information had been withheld."

Gatti and other city officials said the only reason a bond would be denied is if Hodge had a poor credit rating. Hodge said she was a victim of identity theft, which affected her credit rating. But it did not prevent her from getting initial approval for the bond.

"It was about race. It was not about my credit because if it was my credit, the bond never would have been issued in the first place," she said.

On Tuesday, Hodge got word that she had been approved for the bond. But that did not prevent the lawsuit from going forward.

"To have her kept out because she is black is a throwback to the days of slavery, which we are just not going to accept," Sansone said."

Source: Pittsburgh Action News 4

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