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Bully-Cummings retires right after mayor's plea

BY BEN SCHMITT AND NAOMI R. PATTON • FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER • SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

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Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings announced her retirement today through a news release just minutes after Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick pleaded guilty to two felonies and agreed to resign.

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"As I move forward to the next chapter of my life, I look forward to spending time with my husband and my family, who have sacrificed so much the past five years," she told reporters today. "My desire was based upon my family's needs. I've delayed being with my family."

Bully-Cummings joined the department in 1977 at the age of 19. She left for several years to work as

a lawyer and returned as assistant chief under then-Chief Jerry Oliver, replacing him on Nov. 3, 2003. Oliver left amid a scandal stemming from a gun being found in his luggage at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

"The men and women of the Detroit Police Department would like to thank Chief Bully-Cummings for her years of dedicated service to the Department as well as her guidance and wish her well in all future endeavors," her spokesman James Tate said in a written statement.

Councilwoman Sheila Cockrel said she was pleased with Bully-Cummings' decision to retire.

"That's the department that needs a lot of attention," she said. "The chief's



REGINA H. BOONE/Detroit Free Press

Detroit Police Chief Ella Bully-Cummings announces her resignation Thursday, Sept. 4. She says she has plans, but will not reveal them right now. Until then, she will spend time with her husband, mother and the rest of her family.

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Police chief retires

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role in the Gary Brown firing fundamentally affected the chain of command.”

Former Police Chief Isaiah “Ike” McKinnon, now an associate professor at the University of Detroit-Mercy, said he was sad to see her go but happy to see her spend time with her family.

McKinnon called Bully-Cummings, who served as his chief of staff for two years, a friend.

“When you are the first at something, you are really watched,” he said. “She did an outstanding job responding to that.”

Former Detroit Police Chief Benny Napoleon, who attended Cass Technical High School with Bully-Cummings, gave her tenure mixed reviews.

“Her legacy will be one of quite frankly discontent among the rank and file ... who are not very happy with the direction of the department,” he said. He called her bright and capable, and said Bully-Cummings was handicapped with a reduced police force of 3,000 officers.

“She was placed at a severe disadvantage ... that you cannot blame her,” he said.

Current Assistant Chief Ralph Godbee said the chief was a “tough businesswoman who had to make tough choices.” He said she had to assert her authority in a man’s world, especially later when she silently battled breast cancer two years ago.

“She strapped it up every day, and held us accountable with valor,” he said.

Free Press staff writer Zachary Gorchow contributed to this report.

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- Detroit
- Wayne
- Oakland
- Macomb
- Metro
- Michigan
- Election 2008
- Driving & traffic
- School closings
- Columnists

Nation/World

- Top stories
- Lotteries
- Election 2008
- Nation/World Business

Sports

- Lions
- Pistons
- Red Wings
- Tigers
- U-M Wolverines
- MSU Spartans
- High School Sports
- Scores
- Columnists
- Shock
- Outdoors
- Olympics sports
- Golf

Auto racing
Detroit Marathon

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Things to do
Celebrities
Movies
Music
TV/Radio
Casinos
Theater/Arts
Dining
Video games
Metromix.com
Photos

Autos/Business

Auto news
Business news
Markets
Auto reviews
Technology
Detroit Auto Show

Life

Travel
USA Today Travel
Shopping
Relationships
Food
Pets
Health
Columnists
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