

New Haven Register

The recent letter from Ohio Attorneys Dennis Thompson and Christy Bishop regarding the New Haven firefighters' discrimination case was offensive. This husband-and-wife legal team work for a racially exclusive organization whose rhetoric is inflammatory, divisive and destructive of firefighter morale. Their legal advocacy for racial preferences is socially backwards. Ignorant about the New Haven Fire Department and the evidence in this case, they fling baseless criticisms of exams they've never seen, denigrate those who worked hard to pass them, and, from the safety of their desk jobs, insult firefighters everywhere by scoffing at efforts to maintain the highest standards in their dangerous and heroic occupation.

They misleadingly suggest "fire chiefs" support their views. (New Haven's current and former fire chiefs certainly do not – they believed the exams my clients took were fair and the results should be honored) Who are these "several chiefs" they represented in an amicus brief to the U.S. Supreme Court? One is the former African American Fire Chief of St. Louis, Sherman George, notorious for his brazen refusal to promote white firefighters. Defying an order from the city's mayor, who sought properly to respect a court ruling rejecting the claims of black firefighters that a promotional exam was "discriminatory," George was removed as chief for insubordination and acting contrary to public safety. In their brief, Thompson and Bishop identified their client as a "distinguished individual" who is a "former" fire chief. They get an "A" for abbreviation.

More amusing is their complaint that a "national fund-raising machine has arisen" to finance my clients. This "machine" consists of ordinary folks from around the nation who bought a tee shirt to help these firefighters defray expenses. Thompson's and Bishop's self-segregated organization claims dues-paying members from England, Africa and the Caribbean, and solicited "tax deductible" donations to fund its lawyers' amicus brief and screeds of racial division. My clients enjoy no such fund, only support from strangers of all races. Perhaps that is what irks Thompson and Bishop the most.