



Comments

Subscribe
Starting at 99 cents

Members
Sign In

City's new records chief once OK'd sealing names of police facing OUI charges

By [Meghan E. Irons](#) and [Todd Wallack](#) | GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 30, 2016

The state's former public records gatekeeper, tapped Thursday for a similar job with the city of Boston, had previously ruled the city could withhold names of police officers charged with drunken driving and race and gender information of city workers.

Mayor Martin J. Walsh announced Thursday that he had selected Shawn Williams as the city's first director of public records, saying the appointment builds on the city's "commitment to transparency and good governance."

Williams is expected to start Jan. 9 and will report directly to the city's corporation counsel, Eugene O'Flaherty. He will be paid an annual salary of \$95,000, according to the mayor's press office.

"Shawn has written the book on public records law, and I'm thrilled he will be joining City Hall to ensure openness, transparency, and compliance around all public records matters," Walsh said in a statement announcing the appointment.

1 of 5 free articles. [Subscribe now](#)

Get **Fast Forward** Comments

your inbox:

Forget yesterday's news. Get what you need today in this early-morning email.

Sign Up

Williams, an attorney who worked in the Public Records Division of the secretary of state's office for a total of 11 years, will be in charge of coordinating and streamlining Boston's procedures for receiving and responding to records requests. He said in the press release that he is grateful for the opportunity to lead Boston's public records unit.

"I look forward to ensuring Boston is the leader in public records good practices," the Beacon Hill resident said.

His move to City Hall raises questions of whether he violated state ethics rules by failing to recuse himself from public records decisions involving the city while he was interviewing for the job.

The Walsh administration said that the city spoke to Williams about the job on Dec. 9, received his resume on Dec. 11, interviewed him on Dec. 14, and offered him the job on Dec. 15. Williams accepted the position the same day.

State records show he signed decisions involving seven public records appeals related to the city of Boston after submitting his resume to the city, including four decisions dated after he accepted the job. He signed three more rulings on Dec. 9, the same day he spoke to the city about the job, but it was unclear which came first.

Comments
Both the secretary of state's office and the State Ethics Commission said Williams did not file a conflict of interest form disclosing the fact that he was interviewing for a city job. Brian McNiff, a spokesman for Secretary of State William F. Galvin, said Williams did not tell the office he was taking the job until about a week ago.

Williams did not respond to interview requests made through both his old and new employers. An Ethics Commission spokesman declined to comment on whether Williams violated state rules.

Audrey Coulter, a spokeswoman for the mayor's office, said the city "believes Mr. Williams acted ethically during his hiring process."

As state supervisor of records, Williams oversaw thousands of appeals by citizens denied records across the state. He frequently helped nudge agencies to respond to requests, provide records they tried to withhold, or justify their fees. But he has been criticized for a series of controversial rulings.

For instance, he ruled last year that Boston could withhold names of police charged with drunken driving. And he once ruled Abington's school board could withhold a videotape of a public meeting at which a board member performed a magic trick with a bra because it would embarrass board members — even though the meeting was open to the public and broadcast on community television.

Last fall, he blocked the Globe's request for gender and race or ethnicity records of individual employees. The paper sought the data to determine whether Walsh was honoring his pledge to build an administration that reflects the city's increasingly diverse population.

Williams said such lists were personnel information exempt from the public records law. Two years later, a Suffolk Superior Court judge ordered the mayor to release the records, and the Walsh administration complied.

The Globe has won five straight court rulings challenging decisions in which Williams ruled that agencies could withhold records.

Williams did side with the Globe in its quest this year to get the Walsh administration to divulge if federal authorities had served subpoenas at City Hall. Williams ruled that the city had failed to meet the legal burden for withholding the records and ordered the city to acknowledge if it had received any federal subpoenas.

A judge reversed his ruling and determined that federal subpoenas on the mayor's administration can remain secret because of an ongoing grand jury investigation.

Meghan E. Irons can be reached at meghan.iron@globe.com. Follow her on Twitter [@meghanirons](https://twitter.com/meghanirons). Todd Wallack can be reached at twallack@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter [@twallack](https://twitter.com/twallack).

SHOW 32 COMMENTS

Stay updated, right in your news feed.

Like 430K

© 2016 BOSTON GLOBE MEDIA PARTNERS, LLC