FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Pittsburgh Black Media Federation

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Pittsburgh Federation Disappointed with Removal of Black Journalist from Social Justice Coverage

PITTSBURGH (June 5, 2020) — The Pittsburgh Black Media Federation is outraged by the removal of Pittsburgh Post-Gazette journalist Alexis Johnson from any engagement with covering the social justice protests unfolding in Pittsburgh and around the world that are related to the police murder of George Floyd.

To deny the African American reporter the opportunity to cover this news removes an opportunity for the Post-Gazette to present a more fair, nuanced, and informed portrait of what is happening in local communities.

More so, the Federation is baffled by the management’s justification used for removal. Johnson’s social media communications was from her private Twitter account. It was there that she raised a question and offered a comparison that challenged stereotypes. There was no malicious bias and nothing to suggest her reporting would be compromised or slanted if she continued telling the story of the protests. The Federation is in sharp disagreement with the action taken by the Post-Gazette’s managing editor.

Brian Cook, president of the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation says, "It is unfortunate that Ms. Johnson’s voice has been silenced at a time when diversity in the media is needed more than ever. To remove one of very few African American news reporters – in the entire city of Pittsburgh – from a beat where she could make a difference, is not only troubling, it is abhorrent."

Michael A. Fuoco has been a reporter at the Post-Gazette for 36 years. He is president of the Newspaper Guild that represents 140 journalists, including Johnson.

He said the Guild is “beyond troubled” by the barring of Johnson, who because of her race and lived experience brings a necessary context to covering such a monumental story, which affects the nation and the lives of Black Americans.
“Her experience as a Black woman reporter is not being utilized by white editors who make a decision that she could not cover protests and systemic racism that affect Black people,” Fuoco said. “As a white man I’m appalled, as any person of good heart would be. We demanded they rescind their barring of her.”

There are “far too few Black journalists at the Post-Gazette and to take her off such an important story… it’s beyond comprehension,” said Fuoco, who also called Johnson’s tweet “innocuous.”

P-G management, he said, claims the tweet invalidates her from any coverage of the protests of the police murder of Floyd or of the systemic racism that has infected American society for too many decades. But, Fuoco said, the “tweet was not confrontational or controversial and for the P-G to use it to bar her from covering such an important story is beyond disturbing.”

Furthermore, he added, the P-G has no social media policy, only guidelines, so Johnson committed no contractual violation. Fuoco said this is a racial issue because at the same time the P-G is barring a reporter for what it calls bias, it is publishing editorials that promote the theory that property damage is as tragic as the police murder of a Black man.

“We are steadfast in support of Alexis, our Black brothers and sisters, and anyone who faces discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere”

Signed,

Pittsburgh Black Media Federation Chairs and Officers

Founded in 1973, the Pittsburgh Black Media Federation is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization that advocates for diversity in newsrooms, hosts programs that recognize excellent media coverage of minority communities and trains young people to enter the media industry.

PBMF was named the National Association of Black Journalists’ professional chapter of the year in 2017 and it tied for the honor in 2015.