

# Herald-Star

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## Civil rights leaders question interview process of JMHA



**HIRING QUESTIONED** — Delores Wiggins, president of the Ohio Valley Black Caucus Inc., answers questions during a press conference in front of the JFK Apartments Tuesday afternoon. Wiggins said Gloria Martin, a 23-year Jefferson Metropolitan Housing Authority employee who is an African-American, was not granted an interview for the executive director's post at JMHA despite her education and extensive experience. -- Paul Giannamore

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**STEUBENVILLE** — The Jefferson Metropolitan Housing Authority has hired a new director but is coming under fire from local civil rights leaders over the failure to interview an experienced African-American housing authority manager for the post.



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Melody McClurg will start work as the executive director Monday, the authority said in a statement obtained by the Herald-Star Tuesday afternoon. The statement said McClurg is a licensed nursing home administrator and certified dementia practitioner with a wide range of experience, including law enforcement in the public and private sectors as well as health care and community relations.

Gloria Martin, a 23-year JMHA employee, is property manager for the 160-unit JFK Apartments on North Sixth Street, as well as the 120-unit Bridgeview Apartment on North Seventh Street and the 55-unit family housing in the North End. Delores Wiggins, president of the Ohio Black Caucus Inc., said it is discriminatory that the JMHA board of directors didn't grant Martin an interview.

*"I am very distraught. It isn't right. The process was definitely wrong and I will take this further,"* she said. She plans a meeting in the African-American community and to take the issue to the Ohio Civil Rights Commission and to national civil rights activists.

*"It wasn't that they hired someone. They needed someone. It was the way it was done. They didn't even give this girl a chance. They could have taken the application and interviewed her and if they didn't want her, they could have moved on,"* Wiggins continued.

Wiggins met with reporters at the JFK Apartments Tuesday afternoon. Rumors among residents and staff were that a meeting of the JMHA board was going to start at 4 p.m. to announce a hiring, but no meeting occurred.

Board Chairman Dr. Frank L. Petrola said McClurg was the best of the three candidates interviewed. Petrola said a formal statement about hiring McClurg would be made today.

Those interviews sparked questions at the JMHA board meeting held Sept. 26. The interviews were held Sept. 24 at the Crossroads Christian Church in Wintersville. Civil rights activists, including Wiggins and Royal Mayo, and housing authority residents questioned why the meeting for a public government body was held in a church and held off site from public housing units. Civil rights activists also have brought up the issue of an all-white JMHA board without any African-American representation, despite the number of African-American residents in public housing.

*“There are a large percentage of African-Americans subsidized in public housing and we have no one of color on that board. There should always be an African-American on that board,”* Wiggins said.

The board is comprised of members chosen by various government officials, including one by the mayor of Steubenville, one by the Jefferson County commissioners, one by the probate judge and a tenant.

The board said there were more than 40 applicants who responded to an ad on Indeed.com, and the best three candidates were interviewed. Those candidates did not include Martin.

Martin, who in addition to her housing authority experience holds a bachelor’s degree in business from David Myers University in Cleveland and has been president of the JMHA’s unionized employees, has trained previous managers after they were hired.

At the Sept. 26 meeting, she publicly declared she was an applicant and believes she has the experience and ability and wanted an interview.

Debbie Bailey, a longtime housing authority employee, retired after a year as executive director as of Sunday. The authority board has not publicly stated if there is an interim director. Pamela Ashby, field office director of the Cleveland office of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, said, *“We look forward to working with the board to see*

*that someone is named in the immediate future.*” She said it’s up to the board to determine who the next executive is, but HUD needs to have someone in place in the meantime to handle day-to-day operations.

Residents at the JFK Apartments circulated a petition beginning Monday and had gathered more than 60 signatures as of Tuesday afternoon in support of Martin. Various employees and residents expressed support for her to reporters in the JFK lobby.

The authority has been through multiple directors in recent years, averaging about one a year.

The housing authority board’s statement about McClurg indicates she has *“served on a couple different committees at JMHA in the past and is well versed in what has been going on with housing in Jefferson County.”*

The statement said McClurg said, *“I have a passion for people and making sure everyone has a clean and safe environment to live. I also have several long-term relationships with agencies in the area that can contribute to the success of JMHA and will benefit the residents.”*

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