

On Dec. 23, 1998, Portland Police Officer Damon Woodcock—then a nearly 8-year veteran of the force—went before the City Council to testify in favor of Resolution 1851, which added gender identity to the city's nondiscrimination policy.

"I feel fortunate to be able to say that I have not personally experienced

any discrimination in the workplace," testified Woodcock, who began his transition from female to male a year earlier. "But I would be naive to believe that the fear and hatred toward those whose gender identities do not conform to the norm does not exist. Everyone should have the right to feel safe in the workplace. No one should have to fear for their safety while using the restroom or locker facility."

Seven months later, Woodcock, who has received numerous awards and commendation letters during his career with the Portland Police Bureau, would find himself fearing for his own safety.

Approximately July 1, 1999, Woodcock's locker at Central Precinct was defaced. The incident occurred after Woodcock had been instructed by former Chief Charles Moose to move into the men's locker room.

Some feel that change was made too abruptly, without the necessary planning for a smooth transition. (In other words, one day Woodcock was in the women's locker room, the next he was in the men's.)

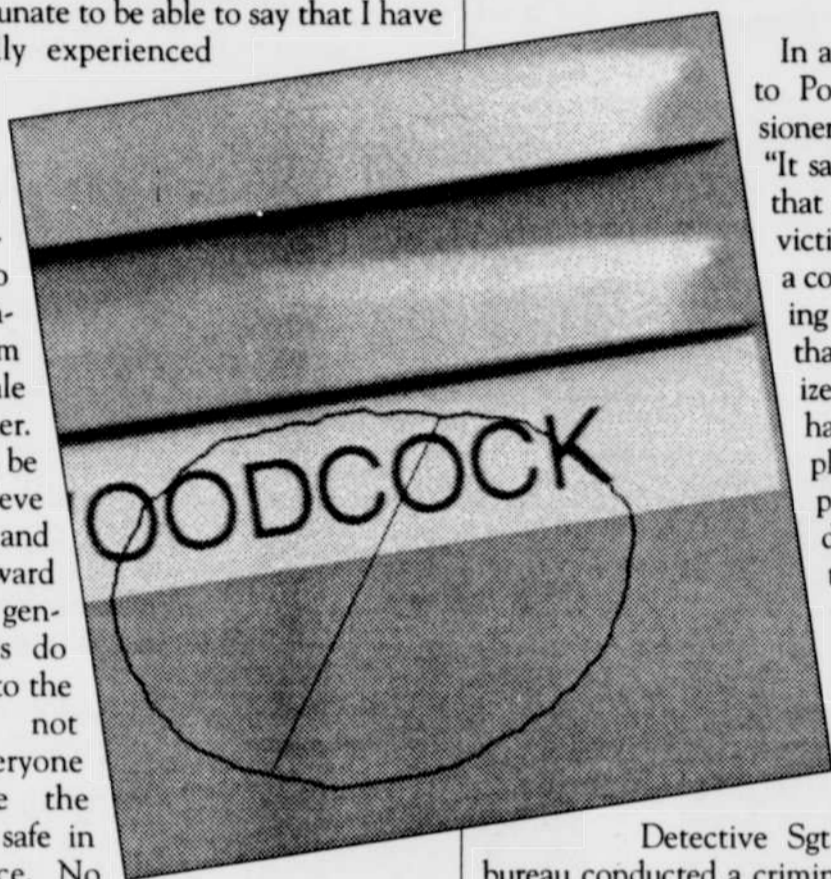
Someone in the guy's locker room apparently didn't appreciate the switch and scrawled a circle around Woodcock's locker nameplate, then drew a slash through it.

A superior ordered the graffiti to be cleaned off. Woodcock, meanwhile, was not informed of the episode, and only learned about it a few days later from another officer.

Woodcock, who has legally changed his sex from female to male, has called the incident a bias crime, one that has evoked fear for his safety.

## ONGOING STRUGGLE

Officer will appeal the denial of his disability claim by Inga Sorensen



In an August 1999 letter to Portland city commissioners, he wrote, in part: "It saddens me to tell you that I was recently the victim of a hate crime by a co-worker.... I am writing to put you on notice that I have been victimized, threatened and harassed in my workplace, and I fear for my physical safety. I wonder how members of the sexual minority community can ever truly feel safe when minority officers can't even feel safe in the workplace."

According to Detective Sgt. Mike Hefley, the bureau conducted a criminal investigation, but no suspect was ever identified.

Woodcock also requested a transfer to the Tri-Met police division, to no avail.

Woodcock, who hasn't been back to work since July, filed a work-related stress claim.

A few days ago, on April 11, members of the Portland Fire and Police Disability and Retirement Board rejected Woodcock's disability claim by a 5-5 vote following a two-day hearing.

"I'm disappointed in the lack of bureau support. I believe it sends the wrong message to the entire community. I'd like to thank those members of the board who offered their support," Woodcock told *Just Out* via e-mail. "Obviously, I don't agree with the stand the bureau has taken with regard to my disability claim. We will be appealing the board's decision and letting the legal system take its course."

Portland Mayor Vera Katz, who sits on the board, backed Woodcock's claim. Police Chief Mark Kroeker, also on the board, opposed it.

As for how the bureau handled his situation from the get-go, Woodcock says: "I don't believe there has been much contention among the rank and file that things could have been handled better by management.... Due to the ongoing investigation, I can't discuss the details of the case. But I believe even the bureau agrees that this situation could have been managed more sensitively with respect to all involved."

The Portland Police Bureau has been hailed by some as a model for advancing acceptance of sexual minorities, due in large part to its Sexual Minorities Roundtable, a monthly gathering of queers and cops at Central Precinct. The roundtable is open to anyone from the queer community who wants to participate.

At the same time, Woodcock's attorney, Lynn Nakamoto, notes "there clearly have been some complaints both internally and externally" by bureau members who are sexual minorities.

Most notable is a lawsuit brought by Mike Garvey, a Portland police captain.

In 1998, he filed a federal civil rights lawsuit against the city of Portland, alleging Mayor Vera Katz and then-Chief Charles Moose discriminated against him due to his sexual orientation. Earlier, Garvey, who is gay, came under fire from superiors because of allegations he had paid male prostitutes for sex. In 1996, a grand jury refused to indict Garvey, who was demoted from commander to captain. The lawsuit maintains Moose held a "discriminatory animus toward gay males."

Says Norm Costa, co-chair of the Sexual Minorities Roundtable: "We seem to have a good working relationship with the bureau...but what happened to Damon should not be tolerated."

Still, Costa says he'd like more information.

"Neither side will say much about it, so it's really hard to know," he says.

For his part, Woodcock is encouraging members of the queer community to attend the monthly Sexual Minority Roundtable meetings.

"Be active and let your voice be heard. Continue to educate the police bureau on minority issues. Continue to hold the police bureau accountable for its actions and words," he says. "If you are a queer officer, I would encourage you to attend as well. If you come into contact with the police, be truthful, cooperative and respectful. That goes a long way toward the outcome of the encounter."

Kroeker, meanwhile, reportedly has urged Woodcock to return to work.

To that notion, Woodcock says: "When I am medically able to return to work, I intend to do so. It has been my intention from the beginning to positively resolve this situation."

He adds: "Overall, I think the bureau is moving in the right direction. But it still has a long way to go. Sometimes it takes a few steps backward, as it has in my case. I was stunned to hear that the police bureau has concluded that the vandalism to my locker was not even a crime, let alone a hate crime."

"Personally, I find that very frustrating, especially in light of the fact that this very issue of police not recognizing hate crimes is a topic frequently discussed at the Sexual Minorities Roundtable," Woodcock concludes. "Continu-

August 9, 1999

Commissioner Dan Saltzman  
1221 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Room 230  
Portland, OR 97204-1994

Dear Commissioner Saltzman:

I am a police officer for the City of Portland. I have been a full-time officer for nearly eight years, and I was a reserve officer for the city for six years prior to being hired. I have worked at Central Precinct, with the exception of training transfers, for my entire career. I have received numerous awards and commendation letters during my career with the Portland Police Bureau. I have been an "out" sexual minority officer for the past seven years. In the summer of 1997 I came to realize I am transgendered, and in December of 1997 I began the transition from female to male.

I testified before you and the City Council on December 23, 1998 regarding the passage of Resolution 1851, which added gender identity to the city's non-discrimination policy. In that testimony I stated the following:

"I feel fortunate to be able to say that I have not personally experienced any discrimination in the work place. But it would be naive to believe that the fear and hatred towards those whose gender identities do not conform to the norm does not exist. I am here to tell you it does exist. Everyone should have the right to feel safe in the work place. No one should have to fear for their safety while using the restroom or locker facility."

It saddens me to have to tell you that I was recently the victim of a hate crime by a co-worker. This incident occurred after having moved into the men's locker room at Central Precinct. I am writing to put you on notice that I have been victimized, threatened and harassed in my work place, and fear for my physical safety. I wonder how members of the sexual minority community can ever truly feel safe when minority officers can't even feel safe in the work place.

It is my hope that this incident will be used to create positive change within the Police Bureau so that all it's members can feel safe in the work place.

ing to foster communication between the bureau, its minority members and all the minority communities is the key to making progress. Clearly this incident has highlighted the need for the bureau to work even harder at gaining and regaining the trust of the community."

■ For questions or comments about *Just Out's* Northwest, national or world news coverage, please send an e-mail to News Editor INGA SORENSEN at [inga@justout.com](mailto:inga@justout.com).

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