

## **My Experience with Bennington, Vermont**

When Joel, my daughter, and I moved to Vermont we moved there because I wanted to pursue the career of my dreams in law enforcement. We wanted to do things together as a family that we never had the opportunity to do before, for example camping, fishing, and hiking. I wanted to become a police officer. I had just graduated college and I earned my degree in Criminal Science. I did not want to work in a city. I wanted to work in a town, so I decided to apply with an agency in Vermont. I was accepted and went to the police academy and took the exam.

I had big hopes and dreams of being able to raise my children in the county, and my vision from an outsider looking in was that people in the county would be more kind than the city and hold the door for the person behind them. Little things like that were what I wanted so badly for my family.

But once we arrived in Vermont our experience was much different. It was nothing that we ever imagined. The Bennington Police Department targeted us because Joel is a Black man. Nobody at the town did anything about it. It was a really sad situation that we feared the people that were supposed to protect us.

When we wrote complaints against the police department for targeting us, they were ignored. Then, the Select Board exposed our personal information: license plate numbers, vehicle description, addresses – everything thing they could find, they made public. They also publicly bashed us in the local media.

After that, Joel and I left Vermont in fear. It felt like the police department and the town were doing whatever they could to scare us out of town. We literally left with the clothes on our backs. I left food in the fridge, dishes in the cabinet, and all of our furniture. I slept on a cold floor for months just to get away from Bennington.

Our experience in Vermont was traumatizing. Moving to Bennington was the worst mistake I ever made. I now fear the police and local officials. I feel like the town of Bennington got what they wanted. They scared an entire family out of Vermont, and we will not return.

But, I have a voice and I will continue to advocate for myself and my family, and I will continue to share my experience with others, including other families who may be considering a move to Vermont.

Thank you for listening to my story.

Cassandra Keating

