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By JAMES W. WADE III
Staff Reporter

Artis Hughes, the bus driver seen uppercutting a female passenger on a video, was terminated from his position as operator yesterday.

“RTA values its employees and expects employees to follow rules, regulations and policies. Each employee is advised of the rules as part of their employment,” said Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority (RTA) in a press release.

The statement continued, “There are certain actions by our employees that are so serious that the employee is subject to immediate discharge. One of those actions is a use of force against a

member of the public. In the Artis Hughes situation, the customer was out of line and charges have been filed against her.

However, while customers may be challenging or difficult to handle, RTA employees are instructed to exercise restraint and to conduct themselves professionally at all times.**

Mr. Hughes claims that his actions were in self-defense. The evidence does not support that claim. We expect our employees to diffuse any potential situation. We do not believe that Mr. Hughes took the proper steps to diffuse this situation.

The proper procedure would have been to pull over and stop the bus, then call Transit Police for assistance."

In a press conference at the Union Hall, Hughes and ATU President William Nix shared the disappointment in how RTA handled the whole situation.

"The company is supposed to see an operator within three to five days. We want him back to work. Half of the radios on the buses don't work. We need our cell phones," said Nix.

Hughes is receiving support from the community.

"Hughes has been affected by losing his job. He has no more benefits or a paycheck. We want all the community to know many of us support brother Artis. I am speaking for the community. Community, we asking for your support for brother Artis," said Black on Black Crime founder Art McCoy.

The union has been fighting for legislative action to be taken to help protect the drivers. Recently, Cleveland City Council passed a resolution to help protect the drivers. But, everyone doesn't support changing the law.

Cleveland Councilman Jeffrey Johnson feels Hughes could have handled the situation differently. Johnson, throughout his 30 year tenure, has had chairs thrown at him, been cussed out, hit, and yes even spit at but wonders, in each one of those incidents, what if he would have struck the person, especially a woman.

“There is no way I support anyone spitting on a driver or even a passenger, but I believe the law should handle the situation,” said Johnson.

Clearly, Johnson thinks both were wrong. He said the law is already in place and, if she is found guilty, the six month jail term is good enough.

“I believe the driver spent more time jaw-jacking back and forth instead of pulling the bus over and calling the police. To me, it wasn’t self defense,” said Johnson.

Nix explained that his drivers are constantly under attack by people and RTA has sent a clear message that it’s okay to treat his drivers any kind of way.

“My drivers face this onSt.Patrick’s Day, Halloween, and almost everyday is Halloween for one of my drivers. The question becomes is RTA trying to work with us,” said Nix.

It is clear RTA had not planned to punish Hughes from the incident until the video went viral. The Call & Post requested the policy and procedure manual from RTA to see what steps should be taken if something like this happens.

Did RTA do all they could to satisfy the outcome of this situation?

Was Hughes pushed to the point where this was his only way out?

Many things become gray, depending on whose side you want to take. If the drivers and unions have been asking for help, what safeguards was put in place?

George Dixon, RTA board chairman, released a letter about working with the union to establish a committee for these type incidents after the video went viral. *RTA, the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), and the Fraternal Order of Police have established a joint Labor/Management Committee to discuss and implement strategies to enhance the safety of all employees.*

RTA cited the following reason for the termination: “RTA Employee Handbook Dischargeable Offense #5,” which says, “*Use of overt force, such as shoving, pushing, striking of any blows in any manner or fashion against another employee, supervisor, management personnel or such actions against members of the public while in the course and scope of employment or at any time while on company property. The only exception shall be where it is clearly established that the employee acted in self-defense.”*