

Officer 'put in awkward position' by Berkeley police chief

By Tracey Taylor

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Sgt. Mary Kusmiss of the Berkeley Police Department was put in a difficult and very awkward position by her boss, Chief Michael Meehan, when he asked her to [go to a reporter's house at 12:45 am on March 9](#) to request that a story be changed, according to an attorney who Kusmiss recently retained.

"She is the only person who knows what went on that night," said Alison Berry Wilkinson, who said Kusmiss was told today that she will be a witness in a city investigation into Chief Meehan.

Wilkinson said Kusmiss "did everything to avoid ending up on Doug Oakley's doorstep" on the night of March 8-9 when Chief Meehan asked her to do so after seeing an online story the *Oakland Tribune* reporter had written about [a community meeting earlier that night](#).

When Meehan saw that Oakley had made a mistake in the story — reporting erroneously that Meehan had apologized at the meeting for BPD's response to the murder of Peter Cukor, when he merely apologized for his communication around it — he tried to contact the reporter by phone and email. He then asked Kusmiss, who is the police department's public information officer, to go to Oakley's house on her way home. Kusmiss tried to find a secondary number for Oakley first, according to Wilkinson. Having failed to do so, she told Meehan she did not think it was a good idea. Kusmiss knew Oakley had a family with young kids, Wilkinson said, and she did not want to disturb them at that hour.

It remains unclear how Sgt. Kusmiss, who reports directly to Chief Meehan, knew Oakley's home address. Wilkinson said Chief Meehan asked Kusmiss if she knew where he lived and when she said she only knew the area of Berkeley, he gave her the street address. On March 11, Meehan told Berkeleyside he assumed Kusmiss knew where Oakley lived, as he himself did. He said he did not give the reporter's address to Kusmiss.

Interim City Manager Christine Daniel [released a statement today](#) saying she had retained the San Francisco law firm of Renne Sloan Holtzman Sakai on Monday to conduct an independent investigation into the situation. The announcement came 25 minutes after the Berkeley Police Association had [publicly called for an independent investigation](#) into the chief.

Wilkinson said she was not contacted by the law firm conducting the independent investigation into Meehan until today. When Wilkinson contacted the city earlier this week there had been no indication they had decided to conduct an investigation, she said.



Sgt Mary Kusmiss. Photo: Frances Dinkelspiel

Kusmiss hired Wilkinson to represent her on Monday.

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