

The Post and Courier

Boeing, officials meet in private

By [Robert Behre](#)

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Boeing officials and a few prominent black elected officials met Friday in North Charleston City Hall to talk about the company's track record on hiring minorities.

But before the talks could begin, confusion reigned over whether the meeting should be open to the public.



The Post and Courier's [Boeing Special Section.](#)

State Sen. Robert Ford, D-Charleston, sent notice of the 10 a.m. meeting to local news media, but when a Post and Courier reporter arrived, Boeing officials and Charleston County Councilman Teddie Pryor appeared surprised.

Pryor argued that the meeting was not subject to the state's Freedom of Information Act, and the Boeing officials in attendance said they were not authorized to make statements to the media. If the reporter stayed, they could only listen.

Ford said he consulted with counsel at the State Ethics Commission and was told that he had to send out a public notice because he and state Rep. Wendell Gilliard, D-Charleston, planned to attend.

The reporter left the room after Gilliard and Ford agreed that only one of them would attend at any given time. Gilliard also left the room.

Later, State Ethics Commission general counsel Cathy Hazelwood said she didn't talk to Ford, and her role isn't to advise lawmakers on the state's open-meeting law.



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The tension over whether the reporter should stay might have been more interesting than the ensuing private discussion. Boeing has received mostly praise for its minority outreach efforts.

"At this point, we think they're doing a good job," Gilliard said while waiting outside in the hall. "Boeing has represented itself well. This meeting here was to just keep building on our dialogue and communication."

Ford wrote Boeing just days after it announced that it would build its new Dreamliner plant in North Charleston. His letter encouraged the company to hire historically disadvantaged businesses.

Last fall, after Boeing said it had steered about 22 percent of its spending toward minority- or women-owned businesses, Ford said he was pleased with the company's efforts.

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