

August 1 2016

Tom Barrett, Mayor
Office of the Mayor
City Hall
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Ashanti Hamilton, President
Milwaukee Common Council
City Hall
200 East Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Edward A. Flynn, Chief of Police
Milwaukee Police Department
Police Administration Building
749 West State Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233

Dear Public Officials,

Violence against and by police is on the minds of many Americans after events in Dallas, Baton Rouge, St. Paul, Kansas City and, most recently, in San Diego. At the outset, we want to make it clear that we recognize that many police officers serve with valor and distinction. While we do not condone violence or retaliation against police officers, Milwaukeeans feel the heartache and are concerned deeply because of the troubled history and strained relations between community members and the police in greater Milwaukee. In metro Milwaukee, Black men, Latino men and other people of color, regardless of background and professional accomplishment, speak of their anxiety at being stopped by the police. Women of color, too, often speak of the same fear. Their anxiety is not unfounded considering that, nationwide, police have killed more than 100 Black men thus far in 2016.

We join with and support President Obama, activists in the Black Lives Matter movement, and people of faith who call for peace and action.

We, the undersigned groups and individuals, believe that it is time to build on efforts to improve police-community relations. While government, community groups, and residents have been taking steps to reform policing and our criminal justice system, we assert that system has significant issues at its core because of structural and institutional racism. We believe that police and other participants in our criminal justice system may not be as explicitly racist as in the past. However, we believe that too often the implicit bias that everyone shares is allowed to surface without check to harm our neighbors, our families, and our young people.

Many specific tactics are possible as we work to improve police-community relations. The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing has many worthwhile recommendations. The Milwaukee Community Justice Council's MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge proposes several strategies to safely reduce Milwaukee's jail population and address racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system. While we do not necessarily endorse all of these recommendations, we strongly believe

that it is long past time for system change. Professional police managers as well as rank and file officers must lead and be committed to learn and change. Change must be based upon action, transparency, accountability and community involvement.

We urge the following near term actions:

1. Beyond our elected representatives, the public must be at the table. For instance, the Milwaukee Common Council's Public Safety Committee has been holding special meetings to hear from government agencies regarding crime in Milwaukee. The public (including young people) has not had an opportunity to present their ideas and input. The committee should hold at least two convenient public hearings around the city where residents and community groups will be free to give their uncensored views regarding police community relations. There are likely to be complaints about individual encounters with police, but this input should be treated with respect and needs to supplement the larger perspective presented by government agencies.
2. The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing recommended that "research conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of crime fighting strategies should specifically look at the potential for collateral damage of any given strategy on community trust and legitimacy". To the best of our knowledge, neither the Milwaukee Police Department nor the Fire and Police Commission have conducted such research. We strongly recommend that the city should shift adequate resources to this effort so that it can be completed before the adoption of the next city budget.
3. Given the scarcity of resources that limits what local governments can do, we understand that Milwaukee may not be able to significantly increase the number of its officers. Therefore, responsible officials should use our tax dollars wisely. The level of force we currently have should be deployed to provide every neighborhood with professional and unbiased police service. Additionally, as retirements take place we must recruit police aides and officers who reflect the diversity of our city and neighborhoods.
4. Technology is a huge part of modern policing. Milwaukee, we are told, has a data driven policing strategy. The Milwaukee Police Department has a data fusion center and utilizes many forms of surveillance technology, including automated license plate readers, dash and body worn cameras, closed circuit TV, cell site simulators, traffic and pedestrian stop data, monitoring of social media such as Facebook, and ShotSpotter. The Common Council, much less the public, knows little about how MPD uses these technologies; technologies that may impact on the privacy rights and other civil liberties and civil rights of innocent residents. The city should create a mechanism to evaluate the impact of surveillance technologies before it spends large sums to purchase the latest equipment or service contracts.
5. To enhance police accountability, the State Legislature should amend Wisconsin law to require diverse civilian membership on an independent civilian review board to oversee investigations and make recommendations in cases of officer involved critical incidents.
6. Finally, for the time being, to improve police-community relations, we must do a better job of listening to one another to avoid the slights and perceived disrespect that hurt. Often it's a matter of providing "procedural justice." The term is used by the US Department of Justice Community Orienting Policing Service which is currently working with MPD on a voluntary Collaborative Reform Initiative. An example of a failure to provide "procedural justice" is the MPD's practice of arresting and taking to a district stations individuals who could be ticketed and released for simple marijuana possession. Being taken to the district station may seem relatively minor, but it may result in more than a bad day and could justifiably be viewed as an

arbitrary exercise of police power. This and similar practices should stop. USDOJ should insist on tough measures to assure “procedural justice” in their CRI recommendations.

Items 1-6 are just some of the possible actions that need to be implemented over the next few weeks and months. More needs to be done in addition to what is already happening and these items. Community groups may have other or additional priorities. We do agree that we have passed the point of a “moment of silence,” “breaking news – live at 10,” or being distracted by phony fights over “political correctness”.

We invite law enforcement leaders and rank and file, elected local officials and all our neighbors in the metro area, to abandon business as usual. We know you can’t and don’t expect government officials to solve all the problems facing our community. We do expect you to make sure that you and the police departments you oversee fulfill your responsibilities, and stop violence, misconduct, and disrespect that undermine good relations between police and residents.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Chris Ahmuty, ACLU of Wisconsin

Clayborn Benson, Wisconsin Black Historical Society

Dr. Patricia McManus, Black Health Coalition of Wisconsin, Inc.

Dr. R.L. McNeely, Felmers O. Chaney Advocacy Board

Eileen Figueroa, League of United Latin American Citizens of Wisconsin

Elana Kahn, Jewish Community Relations Council

Fred Royal, NAACP

George Hinton, SDC

Loree Cook-Daniels, FORGE Inc.

Rev. Greg Lewis, Pastors United

Rev. Steve Jerbi, All Peoples Church

Rev. Willie Brisco, WISDOM

Wisconsin Council of Rabbis

cc: Robert Donovan, Chairman Public Safety Committee

Mary Nell Regan, Executive Director FPC
Evan Goyke, State Representative
George Fachner, USDOJ COPS