

**Raymond Robakowski statement before the Public Safety and Health
Committee of the Milwaukee Common Council on Thursday, December 5,
2019**

Thank you Chairman Donovan and members of the Public Safety and Health Committee. I am Ray Robakowski, and I have the privilege of being before you today having been nominated to serve on the Board of Fire and Police Commissioners. I want to thank Mayor Barrett for his appointment, and also express my appreciation to the members of this committee for considering my candidacy.

I wish to start this morning by providing you a brief background of myself.

I am a life-long resident of the City. I married my high school sweetheart and have been blessed with 42 years of marriage that produced 2 children and 3 grandkids. Between my nearly twenty year career in the Milwaukee Police Department and previous time in the Milwaukee County Sheriff's Department, the Milwaukee County Division of Mental Health and County General Hospital, I have nearly four decades of service in the public sector.

Public service and community involvement have been important to me for as long as I can remember, and is something that is engrained in my family. In addition to my long-time service in public safety, I have vivid memories of my grandfather who was a Milwaukee cop and lived above us during my formative years as a child. Then there are my two sons, one who serves as Milwaukee Police Officer and the other as Waukesha County Sheriff's Deputy. When they chose this career path, I told them to tackle the job every day in a way that is benefitting to the community they serve and honors the family name they wear on their uniform. I know them both to do that and more. I too desire to once again work for the betterment of our community in this most important role.

Most relevant to the position I am seeking is my work as an officer in the Milwaukee Police Department. I served as both a patrol officer in police districts 7 and 5 and later as a long-term community liaison officer at district 5. When I first joined the force I was noted as being an honest and tough cop who pretty much played things by the book. But starting my career a later age and having the benefit of training from two seasoned field training officers, I quickly saw the need for balancing law enforcement with the importance and wisdom in taking time to get to know residents in your patrol area. This involved gaining and understanding people's backgrounds and circumstances, appreciating them as individuals and working with residents in the community to meet their needs. Yes, that is community oriented policing; I am not only a supporter of it, but I did my best to embody it in my policing career. This was particularly true in my eight years as District 5's CLO.

My CLO work afforded me the ability to closely get to know not only the district's neighborhood leaders, its block clubs, and countless residents, but I also knew the area's drug dealers, its gang bangers and prostitutes. In the process of protecting the community and enforcing its laws, my method was to be approachable, understanding and helpful-- garnering the support and trust of the residents I served. I was known in the community as Officer Ray and residents were given my personal cell phone that I would answer at all hours to provide timely help on a moments notice. I did everything in my power to help families or kids in need- even at personal expense.

Perhaps my approach was unconventional for the time I served, but I believe in that old school way of being a cop-- being both firm and fair, getting to know people and earning their trust, and being a resource in the community you serve.

There are a numerous groups I've been associated with that have shaped my professional career and personal outlook-- bodies like the Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault, the Homicide Review Commission and community organizations like Running Rebels. In my career, I saw how many times our approach in dealing with criminals was fostering little more than a revolving door in and out of the criminal justice system. And while perhaps skeptical at first, I became not only a believer but an active supporter on the forefront of the Restorative Justice model. I was not only able to work with the likes of David Kennedy, Mallory O'Brien and the Milwaukee D.A.'s office on Restorative Justice during my policing career, it is something I have been blessed to carry over into my retirement where I've continued the work of repairing lives of former criminals. I am honored to have been awarded and recognized by entities like Marquette University and the CBS Nightly News for some of the work I've been involved in, but the real reward is the friendships I've built and the lives I've seen that have been turned around when someone is afforded hope and finally given a chance.

My goals and vision for serving on the FPC can best described in the context of my values. First, I value transparency and fairness. I believe in being open and accessible to people. As an officer I believed in getting out of the squad and getting to know people at their level. Being a cop was an honor and to best fulfill that privilege, I needed to show people I was approachable, and willing to listen to them and work with them. It is this same desire I carried as Officer Ray-- to hear from all parties, to afford respect to all, and to be fair, open and balanced that I will bring to the Commission.

Next, I value honesty and integrity. The credo I lived by as an officer and I live by in life is one I heard from an active block watch captain in the 5th district, "never lie, and never tell people you will do something you cannot do." I do not over-promise. What you see and hear from me is who I am and what you will get. There will be no surprises, no political gimmicks, or games from me on the Commission. I will judge matters fairly and independently. My effort will be to listen and to seek out the facts; and that will be the barometer for how I will make decisions. This means if a police officer facing discipline did wrong and it is evident, then I will fairly apply a decision to properly discipline him or her—even to the point of seeking termination if warranted. As I stated, I am proud of my family's service in law enforcement including one son who actively serves in MPD. If anything, I will bend over backwards to ensure my approach is fair and balanced. If there is ever a matter where a conflict exists, I will not hesitate to recuse myself.

Knowing that a good portion of the Commission's work has been shaped around controversy of policing policy and practice, I hope to bring the insight and the seasoned knowledge of a veteran who knows the ins-and-outs of the department, knows SOP's and has an understanding of the impacts and effects of the policies and decisions that are made. I also hope to find opportunities to interweave a greater community oriented policing approach into our overall policing strategy. When it comes to areas of the fire department where I have much less experience, I intend to apply reason, understanding and an application of the facts in shaping my decisions.

From what I have witnessed firsthand, the vast majority of officers, like other city employees, take pride in their jobs and do their best. But I also am aware that there have been problematic incidents and policies that sometimes take place-- and with that there are portions of the community where trust is lacking. To help combat that, we must hold high standards in our

hiring practices and create policies that train officers well; this includes shaping understanding for changes in our community to ensure that things like implicit bias and cultural sensitivity training for officers and firefighters is conducted. I also know increasing diversity in our fire and police departments is vital to City leaders and the community, and I share that goal.

I have a strong connection to and passion for Milwaukee. When I retired six years ago and people would ask me where I planned to move my home, my response was, "where do you expect me to go, and why on earth would I leave?" I value service and am honored to be asked once again to step up for my community and home to serve. I will do my best to continue to live up to the personal model of honesty and integrity in this role that will do my family name proud.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the committee today. I would appreciate your support of my appointment before you, and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have at this time.