



## Fire and Police Commission

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March 25, 2026

Dear Wisconsin Law Enforcement Standards Board Members:

On behalf of the Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission (FPC), we write to you to respectfully seek greater flexibility with respect to the physical readiness test (PRT) standards for entry into the City of Milwaukee Police Academy. Our recent hiring data shows that the PRT is a significant barrier to meeting our police officer hiring goals and, consequently, Milwaukee's public safety needs. Granting the FPC the flexibility requested in this letter will allow us to better meet our staffing challenges, without compromising the high standards that currently exist in our testing and vetting process.

### *The Challenges Facing Milwaukee*

It is no secret that recruiting and hiring of police officers continues to be a nationwide challenge, especially for large agencies. In addition to this, Milwaukee faces at least two unique hiring pressures that make our situation especially challenging. First, 2023 Wisconsin Act 12 requires that Milwaukee maintain or increase the sworn strength of our police department each calendar year. We are also required to increase the Milwaukee Police Department's (MPD's) total sworn strength from its current size of roughly 1,575 to 1,725 by 2034. While it may seem like adding 150 officers in eight years would be easy, it is not. Despite hiring 114 officers in 2025, as a result of attrition through retirements and resignations, we increased the average sworn strength of MPD by only 1.4 officers last year. If we continue at this pace and fail to reach 1,725 sworn members, or if we cannot hire enough officers to replace those leaving in any given year, Milwaukee will face **tens of millions** of dollars in financial penalties.

Furthermore, Milwaukee is party to a federal settlement agreement in *Collins v. City of Milwaukee*. As part of that agreement, the FPC is legally required to “recruit, hire, and promote a diverse corps of police officers.” As you will see in the next section of this letter, the current PRT standards make compliance with this legal requirement significantly more challenging. Should the City not be able to meet this requirement, there would be significant legal and financial consequences.

Finally, hiring additional police officers is the right thing to do for public safety in Milwaukee. Our [surveys](#) of Milwaukee residents consistently show that the vast majority of people in Milwaukee want the police to be present and visible in their neighborhoods; however, half of our residents currently believe that the police are not at all, or not very, visible in their neighborhoods. Moreover, being understaffed leads to officer burn out, which leads to more resignations, which only increases the staffing challenges. Overall, this compromises officer safety. Officers on the streets of Milwaukee know that they are in need of more help. The FPC believes that it is the right thing to do to get them the help they need as quickly as possible to improve officer safety, public safety, and officer morale.

### *Barriers to Success*

In order to meet the challenges described above, Milwaukee’s goal is to hold three police officer academy classes each year with 65 recruits in each class. We are currently falling far short of this goal. Our last six classes have yielded 35, 45, 31, 29, 35, and 46 recruits. We are thus consistently running academy classes that are about half full. This is true despite innovations by FPC staff leading to significant increases in applications, from 1,291 in 2024, to 1,804 in 2025. This large increase in applications has unfortunately not led to larger classes.

Our data shows that the PRT is a significant barrier to Milwaukee meeting its goal of hiring 195 officers per year. Indeed, once an applicant starts our testing process, the PRT is the largest single point of failure. We lose anywhere from 25% to 35% of our available candidates to PRT failure. The PRT’s impact on female candidates is even starker. Over at least the last few years, less than one-third of all female candidates pass the PRT!

### *Proposed Tiered Scoring System*

In order to improve public safety and get more officers on the streets in Milwaukee, we are seeking a one-year waiver of the PRT standards for entry into the Milwaukee Police Academy. If granted the requested waiver, the FPC would use an alternative, tiered scoring system described below. FPC staff have discussed this proposal with MPD's command staff and training staff. FPC and MPD training staff then worked together to create an alternative PRT scoring system that was backed by experience and data from past MPD recruit classes. The goal was to create an entrance standard that will increase the size of our academy classes, while ensuring that new recruits still meet a minimum starting fitness standard that will allow them to be successful in the academy and ultimately pass the PRT exit standards. The tiered PRT scoring system that follows is the result of that collaboration and has the full support of the Milwaukee Police Command Staff, the Milwaukee Police Academy, and the FPC Board, which voted to approve this request without objections (of the nine FPC Board members, seven voted to approve, one abstained, and one was excused).

<b><u>Event</u></b>	<b><u>5 Points</u></b>	<b><u>4 Points</u></b>	<b><u>3 Points</u></b>
<b>Vertical Jump</b>	11.5"	10.5"	9.5"
<b>Agility Run</b>	23.40 sec	25.74 sec	28.08 sec
<b>Sit-ups</b>	24	22	19
<b>Push-ups</b>	18	15	12
<b>300m Run</b>	82.0 sec	90.20 sec	98.40 sec
<b>1.5 Mile Run</b>	20:20	20:50	21:20

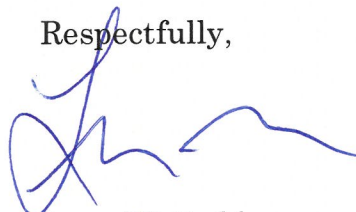
This proposed tiered scoring system would use the same six PRT events, administered in the same way. The top, five-point score level is identical to the current PRT entrance standard. In order to pass this alternative test, a candidate would need to achieve a total score of at least 23 on the six events, as well as a minimum of three points in all individual events. This would allow for a candidate to have an off day or underperform on a single event or two and still achieve a passing score. Looking at data from hundreds of recent recruits, MPD academy instructors believe that this tiered system will allow Milwaukee to hire considerably more

recruits, but only ones that, in their experience, are fit enough to meet the PRT exit standards with appropriate training and support during the academy.

To be clear, we are not asking LESB to waive the PRT exit standards. Thus, there would be no compromise in the high standards that your Board requires for certification as a law enforcement officer. We take to heart the warning offered by at least one of your members that it may be challenging to bring recruits who cannot meet the current PRT entrance standards up to the exit standards in time. It is certainly a point well taken. However, we believe that our situation warrants taking this modest, calculated risk. We have devised an alternative scoring system, based on extensive recruit data, that we believe will increase our academy classes, but still screen out those candidates who are unlikely to meet the PRT exit standards following the academy. Moreover, given that our recruit classes are currently only around half full, even if the additional recruits gained through this alternative scoring system do end up having a lower-than-normal graduation rate, this would still result in a net gain in police officers for Milwaukee.

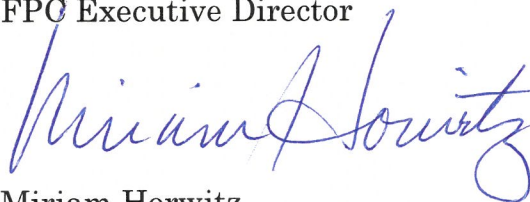
Thank you for taking the time to read and consider this proposal. We sincerely hope that you will consider supporting it and granting us the requested waiver. Again, we believe this plan will provide much-needed relief for our overworked police force and enhance public safety in Milwaukee. If any of you have any concerns or questions for us, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Respectfully,



Leon W. Todd

FPC Executive Director



Miriam Horwitz

FPC Chairperson