

April 9, 2026

Milwaukee Common Council
200 E. Wells Street, Suite 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202
Phone: 414-286-2221

Dear Members of the Milwaukee Common Council:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the confirmation of Karin Tyler as Director of Milwaukee's Department of Community Wellness and Safety.

By way of background, I am a former Chair of the Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Commission (DVSA), a community member directly impacted by violence, a domestic violence survivor, and a child welfare professional with 27 years of experience working with Child Protective Services and the Department of Children and Families. My perspective is grounded in both lived experience and decades of professional service to children and families impacted by violence.

A leader of this department must demonstrate a deep understanding of domestic violence dynamics and their impact on children's mental, emotional, physical, and social well-being. This role also requires courage, integrity, and a willingness to prioritize the safety of the community over political convenience.

Based on Ms. Tyler's record, I do not believe she meets this standard.

Failure to Uphold DVSA Purpose and Accountability: Under Ms. Tyler's leadership as Operations Manager and Interim Director, the DVSA Commission failed to function as an effective policy and accountability body. Commissioner appointments lapsed repeatedly, and the Commission has not meaningfully fulfilled its role since 2020 - during a time when domestic violence-related shootings and homicides were increasing in Milwaukee, and they still are.

Commissioner appointments lapsed repeatedly under Ms. Tyler's tenure as Interim Director (on two occasions) and as Operations Manager. As a result, the Commission has not effectively fulfilled its role as a policy-making and accountability body since 2020. This occurred during a critical period in Milwaukee when domestic violence-related shootings and homicides were increasing across the city, and we continue to experience unacceptable levels of violence.

In 2022, when I was appointed as the City's first male Chair of the DVSA Commission for approximately three months, I found the Commission to be poorly structured. Members strongly opposed my position after I did not support the Mayor's appointment of an individual with a history of child abuse to lead the Office of Community Wellness and Safety (formerly the Office of Violence Prevention).

During my tenure, I challenged the Commission to uphold its stated purpose:

“320-22:2. The purpose of the Milwaukee Commission on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault is to increase safety for victims of domestic violence and their children and for victims of sexual assault, and to hold abusers accountable for their violent behavior.”

While the DVSA executive board expressed concern that the Mayor did not consult them regarding this appointment, they ultimately failed to take a meaningful stand against it. This was despite knowing that the appointment could negatively impact survivors and children in our community and hinder progress in violence prevention efforts.

I urged the Commission to consider the message this would send to the public – that the Mayor and DVSA Commission was prioritizing personal or political agendas over child safety. Because the Commission failed to uphold its own ordinances and bylaws and did not take a principled stand for victims, I made the decision to resign immediately.

Following my resignation, Ms. Tyler, in her role, facilitated a meeting between myself and other commissioners. However, during that meeting, I was not permitted to fully participate, Ms. Tyler had muted my microphone and I was not enabled to respond to questions or explain my position. This experience reinforced my concern that neither the Commission nor Ms. Tyler demonstrated a genuine commitment to supporting victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Given Ms. Tyler’s own experience as a survivor of sexual assault and domestic violence, she had both the opportunity and responsibility to advocate for that community. Instead, her actions demonstrated a reluctance to challenge decisions that could negatively impact the very populations the department is meant to serve. If Ms. Tyler supported the Mayor’s actions under those circumstances, it is reasonable to question whether similar decisions would be made again if she is confirmed.

In my experience, her approach reflected greater alignment with the mayor, executive board and Commissioners than with the needs and safety of the community. Effective leadership in this space requires independence, courage, and a willingness to act - even when it is uncomfortable or unpopular.

As Martin Luther King Jr. once stated:

“Cowardice asks the question, ‘Is it safe?’ Expediency asks the question, ‘Is it politic?’ Vanity asks the question, ‘Is it popular?’ But conscience asks the question, ‘Is it right?’ And there comes a time when one must”

Leadership Gaps in Advocacy and Visibility: There have been several mass shootings in Milwaukee that occurred during her tenures, there has been a lack of visible, proactive communication and leadership. At a time when communities are seeking reassurance, direction, and action, the absence of strong public leadership is concerning.

Failure to Secure Critical Funding – Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant: The Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant Program is designed to support communities in providing safe, structured visitation and exchange services for children in situations involving domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, child abuse, or stalking. The program also aims to improve the response

of the civil and criminal justice systems to families with a history of violence or allegations of child sexual abuse.

As a child welfare professional working with children who have experienced abuse and neglect—and who often suffer from significant mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges—I want the Milwaukee Common Council and our community to understand that family separation takes a profound toll on both parents and children.

In my work with abused mothers, many have shared that they remained in dangerous relationships out of fear that their children would be removed by Child Protective Services. Facilities such as Sojourner Family Peace Center are mandated under Wisconsin law (Wis. Stat. § 48.981(2)) to report suspected abuse or neglect, which can create fear and hesitation among victims seeking help. Some mothers have expressed that they would rather risk their own lives in an abusive relationship than face the possibility of permanently losing their children.

As the leader of the first independently owned Black foster care agency, I have worked with children who exhibit behavioral challenges in foster homes, schools, and public settings due to grief, loss, anxiety, and the trauma of family separation. Foster children consistently express a strong desire for contact with their parents and siblings. When supervised visitation does not occur, these children may experience emotional breakdowns that can manifest as self-harm, running away, or involvement in community violence.

Supervised visitation plays a critical role in preserving family bonds and reducing trauma. It helps maintain connections between children and their parents and siblings, while also reducing anxiety for both children and caregivers during out-of-home placements.

Despite the importance of this program, Ms. Tyler failed to apply for the Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant - not once, but twice - during her tenure as both Director and Interim Leader/Director. As a result, Milwaukee lost critical funding that could have supported safe visitation and exchange services for vulnerable children and families impacted by violence and abuse.

It is reasonable to conclude that this failure had a negative impact on families in our community. This lapse reflects a concerning lack of urgency, accountability, and understanding of the needs of vulnerable populations. Based on this pattern, I am concerned that similar oversights could occur in the future.

Ms. Tyler's failure to submit an application for the Safe Havens: Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange Grant is a clear example of why she should not be confirmed as Director of Milwaukee's Department of Community Wellness and Safety. The Mayor and Common Council should carefully consider whether it is wise and responsible to confirm leadership that has demonstrated such lapses in judgment and execution.

Concerns Regarding Understanding of Violence and Its Impact: Homicide and gun violence remain leading causes of death for Black children and adults in Milwaukee and across the country. During a recent hearing, Ms. Tyler was unable to clearly articulate key data points regarding violence affecting youth.

This is particularly concerning given her personal experiences as both a survivor of violence and a parent who has lost a child to homicide. While those experiences deserve respect, they must be coupled with a demonstrated ability to translate that experience into informed, effective leadership and strategy.

A director in this role must be able to clearly identify threats, understand trends, and implement evidence-based solutions. That level of preparedness was not demonstrated.

Leadership, Oversight, and Ongoing Concerns: Ms. Tyler has had multiple formal complaints and allegations raised against her during her tenure in various leadership roles within the violence prevention and public safety space. The Common Council may already be aware that there is an ongoing investigation by the City's Department of Employee Relations (DER) involving Ms. Tyler, which has remained unresolved for an extended period. The Council may wish to seek clarity on the status and timeline of that investigation. It is reasonable to ask whether it is wise and appropriate to confirm an individual to a department head position while such matters are still pending.

I urge the City to move away from making hiring decisions based primarily on personal narratives or emotion and instead prioritize demonstrated skill, competence, and measurable outcomes—especially for a role of this magnitude. The standard of leadership in these positions directly determines the level of service, accountability, and impact experienced by residents.

While there is often public frustration with city government, accountability does not rest solely with the Mayor. It also lies with department leadership and the Common Council, which plays a critical role in confirming those entrusted to lead. These decisions have lasting consequences for the community.

I respectfully acknowledge that Ms. Tyler is a survivor of violence and personal loss, and there is value in that lived experience within the violence prevention field. However, lived experience alone is not sufficient qualification for executive leadership of a department of this scope and responsibility.

Having previously opposed the appointment of Ashanti Hamilton due to concerns about his background, I support the Council's authority and responsibility to thoroughly evaluate appointments. Given prior concerns regarding the City's hiring processes, it is essential that the Council exercise due diligence.

Milwaukee deserves a higher standard for attracting and appointing strong, effective leadership—and that standard should be upheld now.

In my conclusion, The Department of Community Wellness and Safety is critical to addressing violence, supporting families, and improving outcomes for Milwaukee's most vulnerable residents. Leadership in this role must be grounded in competence, accountability, courage, and measurable impact.

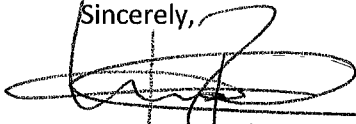
While Ms. Tyler's personal experiences and tenure in the field are acknowledged, they are not sufficient to meet the demands of this position. Based on her record, I do not believe she is the most qualified candidate to lead this department.

The Mayor and Common Council must determine whether it is wise and responsible to elevate leadership that has demonstrated gaps in advocacy, accountability, and execution.

I urge you to prioritize the safety and well-being of Milwaukee's children and families in your decision.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jermaine Reed', written over a horizontal line.

Jermaine Reed

Executive Director

Fresh Start Family Services