

Statement of Common Council President Willie L. Hines, Jr.
June 29, 2007

Today, Mayor Tom Barrett signed into law Common Council File 070335. This is fundamentally the same ordinance that he threatened to veto last year. If anything, the newly added amendment, which now punishes individuals for merely conversing with supposed gang members, gives the City of Milwaukee a law that is even more convoluted and problematic than last year's version.

The Milwaukee Police Department did not ask for this ordinance, because it is not enforceable. The City Attorney rebuked its reasoning, because it is severely lacking in logic. Even on-the-street police officers have conveyed to my office their disgust with its empty rhetoric.

The mayor and Chief Hegerty realize the inherent error of this ordinance, which is why they have decided to further limit its scope. Instead of patrol officers using it – as was originally intended – the Gang Intelligence Unit and Anti-Gang officers will be responsible for implementation. Translation: anti-gang officers will now break up gang activity. (One wonders, what did they do before?).

Furthermore, in more than a decade of public service to the city, this is the first time I have ever seen an MPD resolution that requires supplementary training for implementation. How long will the training last? What will it entail? Will the new chief be agreeable to these burdensome requirements? In the end, police hours are far too valuable to waste on unnecessary training when we already have perfectly good loitering laws for gang members – or anyone else for that matter.

But aside from the hedging and qualifying, an important question still remains: What has changed since last year, when Mayor Barrett found this same ordinance so repugnant?

There is really only one logical explanation for his philosophical flip-flop: Political pressure. Our mayor has been roundly criticized for being a day late (or three days late) and a dollar short (or \$500,000 short) on too many crime-fighting fronts. Politically speaking, he has put himself in a position where he has almost no choice but to sign any anti-crime ordinance that captures headlines, regardless of whether or not it captures criminals.

When it comes to crime prevention, our citizens deserve real legislation, not political pandering.

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