

## **Griselda Aldrete Remarks to the Public Safety and Health Committee of the Milwaukee Common Council**

Monday, July 29, 2019

Thank you and good morning Chairman Donovan and distinguished members of the Public Safety & Health Committee. I am Griselda Aldrete, and I have the privilege of being before you today having been nominated to be executive director of the Fire and Police Commission. I want to thank Mayor Barrett for his confidence in me, and I express my appreciation to members of this committee and Common Council for your consideration of my candidacy.

I wish to start this morning by providing you a little bit of my background.

My passion in life centers around three basic tenants: advancing education, supporting equality, and embracing diversity. I was born in Milwaukee, raised in Mexico to a Mexican father and an El Salvadoran mother, and returned to this country at a young age. I felt, firsthand, the impact labeling and bias can have. My father was a steamfitter and my mother a home maker. They instilled in my older sister and me the value of hard work, determination and educational achievement as an equalizer for a young Hispanic woman.

As a child, I was frequently bullied and made fun of, and I often times felt helpless. In some ways, I felt ashamed of not being able to assimilate fast enough into a country, culture, community, and language that was so foreign to me. There were times I resented my background. Kids were mean and, as an impressionable girl, I can say my confidence and desire to be successful were minimal despite having positive influences at home.

In fifth grade I met my first mentor and my life changed forever. With guidance, I continued my education graduating from St. Joan Antida High School, and Marquette University where I double majored in Criminology and Law Studies, and Spanish. I left Milwaukee for a time to pursue a Master's Degree in Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska-Omaha under the guidance of Dr. Samuel Walker, a leading criminologist with a specific focus on policing. His influence was instrumental and lasting. It has impacted my outlook on the fields of criminology and law enforcement.

I decided to attend law school with the intention of becoming an immigration attorney. I quickly realized my passion lied in using my law degree in a non-traditional way-- to impact policy and make systemic changes that would benefit underrepresented peoples. I attended Marquette University Law School part-time over seven years before completing my degree. That was intentional because continuing the work I was doing on behalf of others and retaining a pulse in the community was important to me.

I have worked as an investigative reporter at Aquí Milwaukee Magazine, as a social worker for Child Protective Services at La Causa, director of special events at UMOS, as a teacher in criminal justice at a number of local universities and colleges, and in leadership roles at the Cream City Foundation and most recently at Hispanic Professionals of Greater Milwaukee. The common thread in my career is giving voice to people who have felt unheard, misunderstood, or oppressed.

My story directly correlates with my desire to serve as executive director of the Fire and Police Commission. We know that knowledge is power, and that being of diverse backgrounds is powerful and beneficial; but, for people in vulnerable positions as I once was, it is actions that matter.

My background has prepared me to respect and appreciate ALL communities in Milwaukee. Yes, English is my second language; I believe being bilingual will be an asset to this position. My legal training and educational background in criminology and law studies will be as well. Further, I have strong experience in administrative and leadership positions with multiple organizations and multiple boards of directors. I have served as a facilitator, organizational planner, and executor of strategic visions. In those positions I have built and managed external relationships with community coalitions, community leaders, and elected officials. These are things that I have handled with the highest level of proficiency and transparency, and they are strengths I bring to the Fire and Police Commission.

The executive director position is an opportunity to serve my City in a meaningful way. My ability to assess, create, and build systems and infrastructure has served me well in organizations I have led. My vision is to build community trust in the Fire and Police Commission-- to be a bridge builder for our City and all the communities in it. That includes the people living and working here, and the firefighters and police officers working to keep our City safe. I will build upon the accomplishments of the past executive director and the Fire and Police Commission staff. Furthermore, I will work closely with the Commission to give the community open access to the FPC and its work.

I would like to share some of the issues I hold as important for the Fire and Police Commission to prioritize:

- First, maintaining independence, transparency and accountability as governed by the law and policy. This involves ensuring that Commissioners are prepared and provided timely and proper information to make decisions regarding policies and practices of the Milwaukee Police and Fire Departments. That includes ensuring that the Fire and Police Commission communications are properly transmitted and translated to the community and stakeholders. These principles run to the core of my integrity, so, if anyone doubts, I reiterate that I will be independent of outside influence and I hold the communities we serve in the highest regard.
- Engaging the community's voice in the Fire and Police Commission's work is a fundamental mission and responsibility. I will make certain the Fire and Police Commission engages our community actively and finds better ways to listen. Additionally, we need to build on continuing outreach efforts throughout Milwaukee to ensure that all voices are heard and embraced, particularly with our minority communities and our young people. Some other key stakeholders I will engage to shape Commission priorities include the faith, non-profit, grassroots organizational, higher education and business communities. I would like the Fire and Police Commission to work with City leadership to attend more community meetings, and, by doing that, improve public communication and accessibility, ensuring there is a clearer understanding of the role and functions of the Commission. For example, I would like to explore ways to host community office hours in various areas of the City by Commission staff and receive greater input from young people and the City's Youth Council. Engaging residents is extremely important as we recruit new public safety employees. I am committed to recruiting new police officers and firefighters so that our departments reflect the diversity of our city.
- I will work with the City Attorney's office, the MPD, MPA, community stakeholders and public to review training and procedures for improving police-community interactions —with the aim of both improving the quality of those interactions and reducing costly litigation against the City.

- I will work with the administration and council members to fill the one commission vacancy and the currently expired term of another commissioner. This effort is vital as recent quorum issues have hampered the business of the Commission.
- I will continue to monitor the recruitment and testing practices to focus on “testing in” rather than “testing out” individuals in the fire and police departments. Hiring and promotional exams for various sectors of police and fire have routinely been delayed in the FPC. The Lieutenant’s list, for example, is at least 3 years old, and Chief Morales, I am told, has been back-filling the positions but feels that the list is no longer suitable to make promotions. This is important because MPD supervisors are heavily involved in the planning for the DNC 2020 and this is draining time for some of the traditional work duties for those police supervisors. New promotions exams need to be conducted in a timely manner and routine H.R. processes need review and improvement.
- 911 call wait times have become a major issue. Right now there are about 30 vacancies for 911 Emergency Communication Operators. 20 trainees are in a class now. That still leaves a shortfall and vacancies occur with regularity. I understand the Commission has challenges administering this. There have been salary adjustments to increase wages for the position, but this may need additional review. Staffing is crucial to 911 reliability and to reducing the wait times for emergency callers.
- There is an RFP planned for a new 911 system. This is part of an effort to combine the (CAD) Computer Aided Dispatch systems of the police and fire departments. Right now there are separate tele-communicators for police and fire emergency calls. A new consolidated system will allow for cross-training and a single response office for 911, helping to alleviate wait times. An RFP for a new system will go out later this year, and a contract will be awarded in 2020. Working with the new Emergency Communications and Policy Director to oversee this system’s successful implementation is one of the bigger tasks ahead of me.
- I will continue tracking and monitoring the recommendations from the ACLU lawsuit to make sure we are conforming to the settlement conditions. The first CJI report from the ACLU settlement is due September 23. I understand it contains an analysis revealing the FPC office is understaffed. Mark my words here; I will fight to ensure that additional staff is added as is needed. This is both about meeting obligations with the settlement agreement, but it also is about better serving our community moving forward. It is further my intent to listen to and work with the Community Collaborative Committee, and all interested parties, on the settlement agreement and other issues.
- Beyond any ACLU settlement staffing requirements, there is a need for a comprehensive analysis of FPC staffing to be done. Staff has fluctuated from 15 to 21 of late and is split in three offices over three floors here at City Hall. This is no way to run a department. The FPC office cannot work adequately on behalf of the community when it is in disarray. I am committed to fixing these issues and working to support the staff to optimize their value and weave this office into a solid team.
- It is evident to me that there is some misunderstanding in the community about the Commission’s work, roles and responsibilities. Similar confusion appears to exist about the roles of the Executive Director and even FPC staff. I intend to work diligently to clarify this in the community to reduce frustration and best empower residents.

- I try to live life by the simple credo: “trust, truth and transparency.” In saying that, I would be remiss if I did not share my belief with you that the process for selecting and vetting potential commissioners and the executive director of the commission needs improvement. In my view, this jeopardizes the ability of the FPC to best carry out its mission of overseeing the police and fire departments, and working on behalf of the community. I intend to work with our City’s elected leaders to explore processes that better engage the community and work to the betterment of everyone moving forward.

As Fire and Police Commission executive director, I will continue to harness the community leadership and development skills I have developed over the years. In this position, I will build on the relationships, partnerships, and mentoring and collaboration abilities I have demonstrated throughout my working life.

None of us works alone. I look forward to partnering with people and organizations throughout Milwaukee. And, I look forward to working with all of you. Thank you very much for this opportunity to be here today. I ask for your support and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.