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City of Milwaukee Common Council

Reinstatement of Officer Schoen sets dangerous precedent

Statement of Common Council President Willie L. Hines, Jr. December 4, 2012

I am deeply troubled by the Fire and Police Commission's inexplicable decision Monday to reinstate the employment of Police Officer Richard Schoen, who was fired by Chief Edward Flynn following an excessive force case. I thought Chief Flynn's response was appropriate and that the officer's actions warranted termination.

Chief Flynn, a police professional, clearly recognized that the officer's use of force was excessive, inappropriate and in violation of standard operating procedure. I myself was appalled when I watched the squad car video that shows Officer Schoen pull Ms. Jeanine Tracy by the hair and deliver several blows to her head while she was handcuffed in the back seat. Ms. Tracy was by no means a threat to Officer Schoen, herself or anyone else. This is a case where an officer, in a rage, assaulted a defenseless citizen.

Officer Schoen's actions are a stain on the reputation shared by the vast majority of police officers, who play by the book and do their jobs with the greatest level of professionalism.

But even more troubling is the decision by the Fire and Police Commission to replace Officer Schoen's termination with a 60-day suspension. Their failure to uphold Chief Flynn's discipline gives the impression that they sanction his assault on Ms. Tracy. Behavior like Officer Schoen's cannot be condoned or embraced. This is not a case where an officer adhered to policy and simply made a bad judgment call. When an officer compromises the honor or his or her badge and blatantly violates police protocol, he or she must be terminated.

Police officers are not above the law and must be held accountable for their actions. By terminating Officer Schoen, Chief Flynn had demonstrated just that. The Fire and Police Commission decision to reinstate Officer Schoen sends a frightening message to the community and sets a dangerous precedent for the Milwaukee Police Department, and should absolutely be corrected.