



CITY OF MILWAUKEE

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Watching the Watchdog

Joint Statement from Members of the Common Council

The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel's* recent investigations into the police department have misled the public about important facts relevant to the safety of our community. That misleading information – whether deliberate or just sloppy – needs to be corrected by someone. And because there is no other daily paper in town, we have no choice but to explain these mistakes directly to the public.

It should be noted that before issuing this statement many of us have pleaded with the reporters and editors at the *Journal Sentinel* to correct their own mistakes. They have refused.

The articles that they started printing two weeks before the June 5 recall election contained three assertions, two of which were explicitly stated as facts and one of which was strongly implied.

Only one of these three assertions is true.

The paper told the public that:

- 1) There are hundreds – and possibly thousands – of coding errors in the data that our police department reports to the FBI about crime categories, and most of those errors involve classifying aggravated assaults as simple assaults.
- 2) Because of those errors, the violent crime rate reported in 2011 was higher than the 2010 rate, contrary to what the Chief has told the public.
- 3) It is likely that these miscodings were done on purpose in order to fool the public regarding the effectiveness of the Chief's reforms.

Only the first point is true. That hasn't stopped the newspaper from repeating the two false assertions – and it certainly hasn't stopped other people who want Milwaukee to fail from piling on, based on these bad facts.

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The first point was an important discovery – and it has led the Chief to do a targeted internal audit and thus to improve the accuracy of our crime statistics. If the *Journal Sentinel* had stuck to the facts, and only the facts, then it would deserve a large helping of thanks from us and from the public. Discovering those coding errors helped make our police bureaucracy better.

But it went beyond the facts, and it used poor methodology to get there. In statistical jargon, it “failed to set a baseline for comparison” when it asserted that crime was up, not down. This was immediately obvious to anyone with any statistical background who reviewed its coverage. This was also pointed out to the paper repeatedly – but it stuck with the story as told.

Now that Police Chief Flynn has presented the results of his targeted audit to our Public Safety Committee, this story has been proven not just speculative, but wrong.

The public should know what we know. In brief, here are the real facts:

- 1) There are thousands of coding errors in the data that our police department reports to the FBI about crime categories, and most of those errors involve classifying aggravated assaults as simple assaults (just like the paper said).
- 2) Those bureaucratic coding mistakes happened at similar rates going back as far as we have comparable records (six years) and, once all the mistakes are factored in, violent crime actually went down by .1% more than we thought from 2010 to 2011.
- 3) There is no evidence that any of those miscodings were done on purpose, and there is now a conclusive and convincing trail of evidence revealing consistent, accidental errors which can now be corrected retroactively and will not be repeated going forward.

We will not speculate as to why the paper of record in this town has spent weeks misleading the public. But the facts are that it has, and the public should know.

It is our sincere hope that the *Journal Sentinel* will respond effectively to this information, so the public is not forced into a crisis of confidence in regards to this important institution. We all want to live in a city with a great, responsible, and trusted newspaper.



Ald. Nik Kovac



Ald. Robert J. Bauman



Ald. Ashanti Hamilton



Ald. Jim Bohl



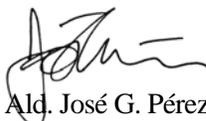
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