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ROBERT G. DONOVAN

Alderman, 8th District

In Derek Williams case, "justice" is in the eye of the beholder

Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan February 22, 2013

While there are individuals in Milwaukee who are pleased, even overjoyed, by the decision of the inquest jury yesterday in the Derek Williams case, I am not one of them. While I respect the jury and the process, I simply disagree with their recommendations.

I have said before and will say again that I do not believe any of the officers involved intentionally did any harm to Mr. Williams, and proving the intent to harm was supposed to be necessary in this case. Let's not lose sight of the fact that officers administered CPR to Mr. Williams, including mouth-to-mouth, to the point of almost vomiting, and yet continued. How many of us would be willing to do the same? If that isn't administering aid, I don't know what is.

The sad reality is it's a common occurrence for individuals in police custody to lie to officers and exaggerate their medical conditions, all in an effort to avoid arrest and secure a ride to the hospital instead of a trip to jail. This happens on a daily basis.

With few exceptions, I know of no other profession in America that is second-guessed and scrutinized more than law enforcement. We ask a lot of our officers as they perform a job most of us wouldn't want and for which fewer would even qualify. Indeed, we ask so much of our officers, it's easy to forget that they are human beings, too. They're expected to get 100 percent of everything right, day in and day out. Perhaps we should hold our politicians to the same standard.

I'm told the three officers for whom charges have been recommended are good, hardworking officers with solid records. Again, I say, they had no intent of harming Mr. Williams. So where is their justice?

While I have no legal training (I'm not an attorney, and certainly not a judge), it seems to me you can never find justice for one person by denying it to others. The death of Derek Williams in police custody was a tragic accident. Holding officers accountable for that accident only furthers the tragedy.

To the men and women of the Milwaukee Police Department—hold your heads up high. The work you do is appreciated. The sacrifices you and your families make in the name of making a difference and the good you do day in and day out will be remembered—perhaps not in this life, but most assuredly in the next.

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